Bill Richardson, Glutton for Punishment

Sex and Real Estate
Zoë Heller

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

ss says Gore is too
too mean. If only.

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CORRESPONDENCE

Hammer time

TO THE EDITORS:

Sarah Wildman calls the Million Mom March "a political use of motherhood" and, as such, dishonest ("Women's Fib," May 29). She also claims the rally was intellectually "incoherent."

What idiotic claptrap. One thing this event had was a laserlike focus on the issue: the absolute need for more control of guns and gun owners in this country. All of the 500,000-plus people on the National Mall were in complete agreement on this issue. That, to me, is coherence. Or perhaps Wildman means that we marchers all come at the problem from different personal and political perspectives—that perhaps we may have radically different ideas about how to solve it. Of course we do. But the Million Mom March was a rally, not a town meeting or a policy debate. We didn't go to hammer out the details; we went to hammer on the thick skulls of Congress. And it appears that we finally got through.

Until my children were born, and I imagined what this gun-happy culture could do to them, I paid no attention to gun control. It was motherhood that brought me to this issue. So, by going to the march, did I "use" my motherhood to score a political point? I sure hope I did! Because for the past 16 years neither my petitions, my letters to Congress, my contributions to anti-gun-violence groups, nor my votes have brought about any real change. And I'm not alone in my frustration. For decades, the majority of Americans have supported gun-control measures. And we never get anywhere, because the National Rifle Association buys off our congressmen and -women and fills the media with its schizoid stories of happy, responsible owners of assault rifles.

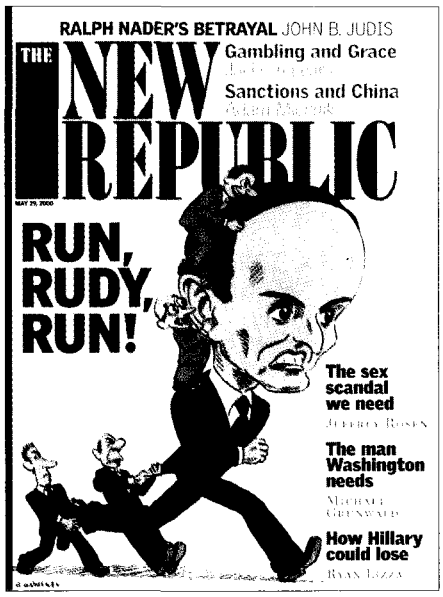
It was a 1,000-mile, 22-hour trip to the march for me. But it was one of the most genuinely patriotic and deeply moving events I've ever been a part of. And, even if we mothers did score some points on May 14 just by being mothers, I submit that it's not the moms who are being dishonest. Or incoherent.

PATIENCE MERRIMAN
Jacksonville, Vermont

Breaking China

TO THE EDITORS:

Your May 29 editorial on the China trade vote takes an admirably evenhanded approach to human rights issues ("Trade Show"). It completely misses, however, the connection between America's economic and foreign policy toward China.



The editorial urges Congress to approve permanent normal trading relations with China but also recommends a policy of strengthening "the democratic, peaceful countries that prevent China from realizing its hegemonic ambitions." Yet the trade agreement, which counts on opening China's markets through the cumbersome, protectionist-dominated World Trade Organization, will perpetuate Sino-American trade patterns that have enabled Beijing to amass more than $300 billion in trade surpluses since 1993.

These hard-currency earnings will help China fund the military buildup that threatens the very Asian countries that THE NEW REPUBLIC would like to protect. And China's guaranteed access to the U.S. market will help it continue to displace imports from its Asian neighbors, thereby weakening them economically. In fact, nothing has recently harmed these countries' economies more than China's currency devaluation in 1994. These moves made China's exports to the United States more price-competitive, crowded out products from the rest of developing Asia, and helped bring on the region's financial crisis.

China, as the editorial predicts, will remain "an insular, paranoid government filled with resentment toward the West and entitlement toward its neighbors." Permanent normal trade can only perpetuate a huge American subsidy for that government.

ALAN TONELSON
Research Fellow
U.S. Business and Industry Council Educational Foundation
Washington, D.C.

Green revolution

TO THE EDITORS:

John B. Judis assumes that every vote for Ralph Nader is a vote that would otherwise go to Vice President Al Gore ("Seeing Green," May 29). This is erroneous. Many of Nader's votes will come from people who would otherwise stay home on Election Day. This is true for me and for almost everyone I've talked with who supports the Green Party candidate.

At some point a polling outfit will ask this question of Nader supporters, and I believe the results will indicate that Nader is not hurting the Democrats too much. But the whining will likely continue from Democrats who have surrendered their party's grassroots to corporate cash and influence.

WINSTON GRIZZARD
Wilmington, Delaware

Favorite son

TO THE EDITORS:

Andrew Sullivan's TRB "Malcolm X" (May 29) disappointed me, an avid watcher of "Malcolm in the Middle" since the show started. Sullivan is greatly impressed by the disciplinary skills of Malcolm's mother, Lois, by which he appears to mean all the shouting, threatening, and implied off-camera physical punishment. But Lois has zero impact on either the behavior or the ethics of her brood. The kid at the military school is still the major hell-raiser, constantly getting into trouble. Her kids at home still take every opportunity for destruction, fighting, theft, and all-around nastiness. When she leaves for a few days, her husband reverts to his premarried condition less than 24 hours after her departure.

Lois an "icon of feminism"? What show has Sullivan been watching? Lois is a desperate woman who can't control her "boys" (including her husband) and has totally lost control of herself. In both the long run and the short run, she amounts, sadly, to nothing more than a lot of noise.

So what would Lois "make" of Gore? The vice president is a well-behaved, grown-up boy with a well-placed sense of humor, a strong grounding in ethics and responsibility, and a lawyer's precision with language. Lois would worship him.

CHERYL HAAKER
Albuquerque, New Mexico

TO THE EDITORS:

Andrew Sullivan's suggestion that Al Gore watch a few episodes of "Malcolm in the Middle" to get a sense of middle-class America reminds me of an incident in

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1987 when Michael Dukakis was allegedly urged to watch the movie *Hoosiers* to get a sense of middle-class people from Indiana. I recall that he did not want to watch it, preferring to ponder texts on Swedish land use planning and Belgian endive farming. If Gore continues on his current path, he will suffer Dukakis's fate.

JOHN D. NORQUIST
Fairfax, Virginia

Out of luck

TO THE EDITORS:
In his stimulating review of the relationship of gambling to American culture, Jackson Lears argues that the gamblers' subculture offers a bracing antidote to what he considers the "cult of self-made manhood," which represents a "shallow utopianism" as reflected in the new economy ("Gambling for Grace," May 29). There is much truth in what he writes, in particular his notion of the danger of "revolutionary virtue." The idea that man is perfectible and infinitely malleable led to many of the horrors of the twentieth century. Lears is also right that our faith in "the human capacity to master fate" is often simplistic and naïve.

But, in my view, Lears takes the argument too far and, in the end, winds up with the same shallowly ironic attitude that is commonplace in the academy. First, Lears implies that the American creed (or, as he calls it, "cult") of "self-made manhood" ignores the role of chance and luck in life. This overstates the case. Certainly nineteenth-century Americans understood the role of Providence in human affairs; indeed, it was this understanding of life's capriciousness that accounted for the religious faith that drove the early settlers. Without God's help, man was helpless against the forces of nature. But the difference is that, where gamblers are driven to an apathetic acceptance of chance, the early Americans struggled mightily to obtain God's grace.

Secondly, Lears seems to dismiss this creed as a myth foisted upon us by "the wealthy and the powerful." But it is neither a myth nor a cult. It reflects our general understanding that, while we cannot control everything in life, those things we can control—hard work and commitment—generally lead to at least some degree of success (at least compared to those who do not try—how often do gamblers strike it rich?). It is hard to see how Lears's "culture more at ease with randomness and irrationality" would be better.

The American experience has been about doing things that were supposedly not possible: constructing a democratic polity, creating a large middle class, winning World War II, exploring outer space. All of these involved risk and, more importantly, faith in the ability to master fate. A more fatalistic society that viewed life as random and capricious would likely not have accomplished any of this. Moreover, while Lears's view might be more intellectually satisfying for the chattering class and others who can afford complacency, it does nothing for those struggling to improve their lives through "plodding" hard work.

MARC W. SCHNEIDER
Rockville, Maryland

TO THE EDITORS:
As a recent graduate of the University of Nevada at Las Vegas's Hotel College whose thesis evaluated a new gambling-awareness program, I was quite interested in Jackson Lears's article. I was, however, ultimately disappointed with Lears's insistence that gamblers are pursuing some sort of "grace" or ecstatic revelation while gambling. This is absurd. Lears is bestowing upon average players and compulsive gamblers alike a sense of purpose that the majority of those who gamble would scoff at.

Indeed, does Lears mean to suggest that casual gamblers and those who gamble to the exclusion of all other activities are completely unlike people who drink, smoke, or use illicit drugs? Does he honestly propose that, unlike these sometimes addictive or deadly pastimes, gambling is somehow more honorable and perfect? While Lears argues that the effect on people who win and lose at gambling is similar to the religious experiences of "faith" and "grace," gambling is just another way for people to displace their emotional issues for a few hours. If they are lucky, they will walk away from the gaming tables and slots lighter in the wallet but not addicted to this emotionally numbing and destructive activity.

LISA M. BYBEE
Las Vegas, Nevada

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TRB

FROM WASHINGTON

Rights and Wrongs

As we call the roll of debts owed the Founding Fathers this July 4, we might want to add one that is frequently overlooked: the birth of America's vibrant and fast-growing tort industry. As with so many of our cherished rights, much of the credit goes to Thomas Jefferson. When drafting the Declaration of Independence, Jefferson was under considerable time pressure. And, of course, he had to deal with that committee of fellow Founders. (What a bother that can be!) So, when it came to enumerating those "unalienable rights" with which we are all endowed, he took a shortcut—ticking off just a few illustrative examples and passing the burden of defining other rights on to future generations: "*among* these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness" (emphasis added).

Ever since, Americans have been struggling to complete that list. And in recent years the project has accelerated, thanks to the burgeoning ranks and growing ingenuity of the nation's trial lawyers, who stand ready to identify and extrapolate any unalienable prerogative as yet unrecognized. Granted, the assertion of individual rights has become an almost global phenomenon. But the tendency to define as a defensible right what other nationalities might view as a mere preference or desire is quintessentially American. Consider, for example, the title of a newsletter that has pursued me unbidden for several years: "The Right of Aesthetic Realism to Be Known." It's not "The Aesthetic Realism Report" or even "Some Things You Might Like to Know About Aesthetic Realism" but a legalistic demand that attention be paid.

Of course, as legal positivists like to point out, a right isn't worth much if no power enforces it. And it is hard to imagine that even an American judge would entertain a claim by the aesthetic realists against whatever force is denying them a hearing. Still, in recent years, innumerable individuals have asserted all manner of rights that would have once been considered quixotic. And some have even gotten them enforced. (You can monitor such cases at Overlawyered.com.)

Some recent assertions cluster under the rubric of *the right to be protected from your own folly*: an airline is blamed for the drunken rage of a passenger; a lawyer sues Ford after the child he left in a van on a hot day dies of hyperthermia; an Oakland, California, bank robber sues the city when a tear-gas device hidden in his loot goes off. Other claims don't have even this much philosophical consistency—people don't want to be protected only from themselves, they want to be protected from life itself. For instance, *the right to non-sticky candy* (a toffee maker is sued for dental irritation); *the right to bladder-friendly brew* (a man at a concert sues the beer concession for damages arising from his embarrassing need to repeatedly retreat to the men's room); *the right to heist if you're homeless* (or at least to swipe shopping carts in San Francisco); *the right to be fooled* (Disneyland is sued for emotional distress by visitors whose kids spot cartoon characters out of costume); and *the right to be scared but not* too *scared* (asserted against the operator of a theme park's "haunted house").

To be sure, not all claimants ultimately collect on their alleged damages. Once in a while a court declines even to consider an assertion of recompensable idiocy. For example, a judge threw out the damage claim of a man who, while drunk, climbed a high-voltage railroad tower. When a man went for a dip with a five-ton killer whale and didn't live to tell about it, his family sued SeaWorld—then thought better of it and withdrew the claim. (Perhaps they figured the whale would take the Fifth.) Still, you don't have some rights you probably thought you had. For example, *the right to stomp in a mud puddle on purpose* (in December, a Florida youth was jailed for this offense). Or *the right not to host rattlesnakes* (a New York court made a realty company tear down a snakeproof fence last October). On the other hand, *the right to dunk parrots* has now been firmly established, thanks to the acquittal of a Florida man charged with repeatedly dipping the head of his friend's bird in a tequila-laced drink. Sports is another area in which the march of new rights has stalled: in 1988, a retrograde federal judge told a tearful Virginia schoolgirl that "there is no constitutional *right to play ball*." A dozen years later, an Ohio magistrate declined legal protection for *the right to win*, dismissing a parent's suit against the coach of a boys' baseball team after a disastrous season.

But the trend is clearly in the other direction, given the emergence of, for instance, *the right to be stopped before you kill again*. Among the cases establishing that right: A California school administrator got a jury to award him $255,000 when a school district, relying on his job application, hired him despite his failure to disclose a prior sex-felony conviction. Similarly, in Ontario (the rights revolution has also taken hold north of the border—witness the recent *right to strip* suit filed by the 52-year-old "Toronto Torch"), a woman is suing two psychiatrists and her family doctor for failing to keep her from smothering her nine-year-old daughter. (The doctors reply that she was a recalcitrant patient who lied about her problems and refused medication.)

Naturally, rights proliferation doesn't come cheap—something old Tom and his fellow Founding Fathers may not have thought about when they left that vague "among these" statement in the Declaration. Today, the tort system's overhead costs (read: the fees that go to lawyers who try the cases) nearly equal the total compensation victims receive. That's why the Committee for Economic Development, a nonprofit business and civic group, recently proposed an intriguing reform scheme. The committee proposes to let consumers choose: they can buy low-cost insurance and guaranteed compensation for economic losses or medical costs alone, or they can keep their current insurance plans, along with the right to the uncertain pursuit of claims for pain, suffering, and other intangible damages.

You needn't worry that ideas like this will soon diminish your right to assert new and creative rights. The costs of the current system are diffuse—higher prices for insurance and almost everything we buy—while the benefits are concentrated in the pockets of trial lawyers, a politically powerful lobby that has provided generous support to President Clinton and other Democrats.

So if you're at the beach this Independence Day and some bully kicks sand in your face, don't head to the gym in search of biceps. Head to the courts in search of justice. True, the bully may counter that kicking sand is intrinsic to his pursuit of happiness. But, with a smart lawyer arguing your *right to liberty from ophthalmic irritation*, you should carry the day. And, when you do, you'll have Thomas Jefferson to thank.

JODIE ALLEN

JODIE ALLEN is a senior writer at *U.S. News & World Report* covering political economy.

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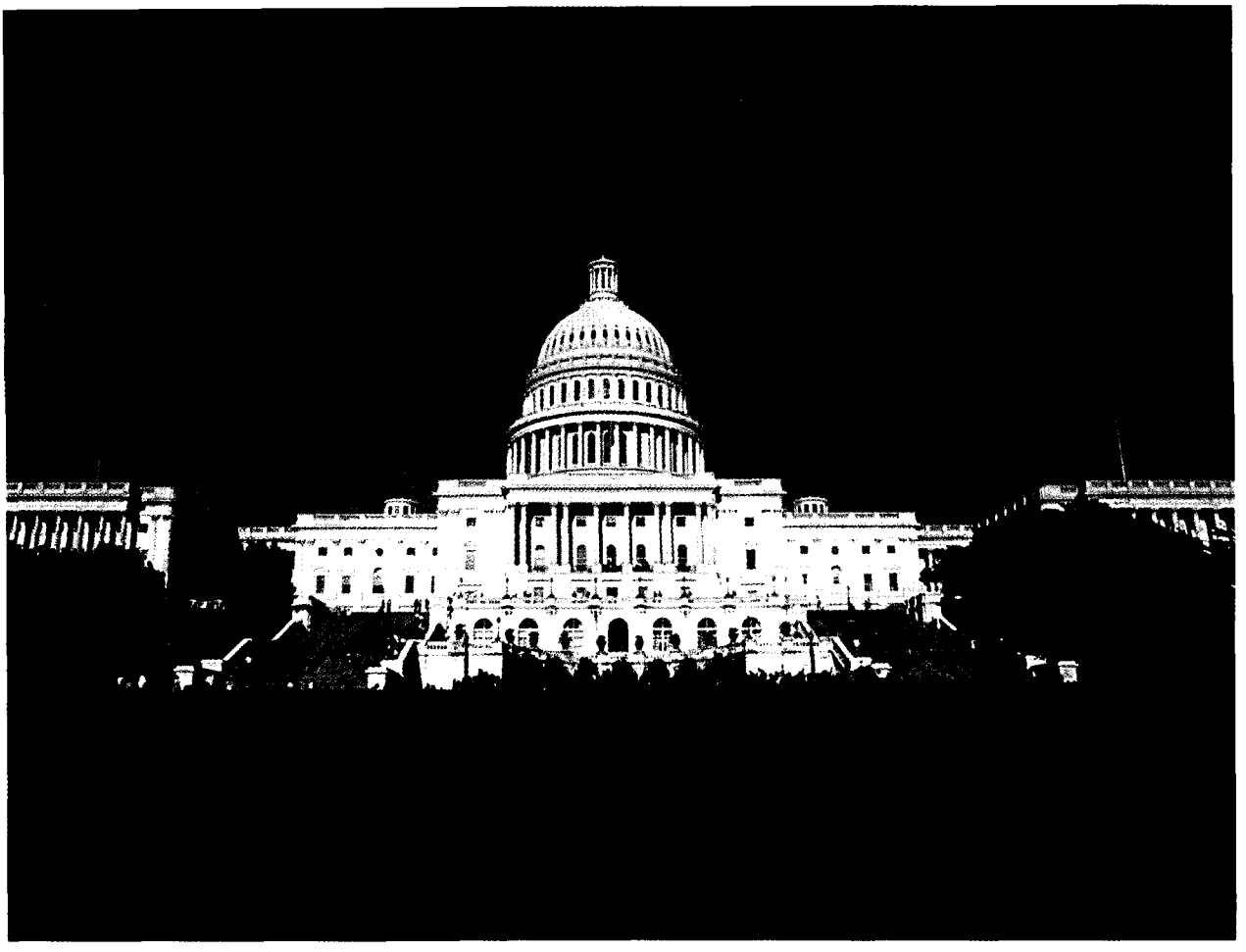

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RU Serious?

ASKED ABOUT ABORTION during his first presidential campaign, Bill Clinton almost got it right. Abortion, he said, should be "safe, legal, and rare." He should have added "and early." Because terminating a pregnancy is always easier, safer, and less morally troubling during the first weeks.

So Clinton was rightly applauded in 1993 when he vowed to bring mifepristone, the French abortion pill commonly known as RU-486, to the United States. Administered only during the first seven weeks of pregnancy, mifepristone expels the embryo when it is no more than seven millimeters long—the size of a grain of rice—in a process that mimics natural miscarriage. Mifepristone's champions say its legalization might spark a nationwide campaign for early pregnancy testing, not merely to encourage earlier abortions but also to improve prenatal care for those who choose to carry their fetuses to term. Clinton fueled those hopes when, in one of his first acts as president, he cleared the way for approval of mifepristone by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), overriding a Reagan-era ban on importing it.

But now the administration has executed one of its signature flops. With approval seemingly at hand, the FDA has laid out an onerous set of regulations that would dramatically curtail access to the drug. Under the proposed regulations, the FDA would not permit doctors to prescribe mifepristone unless they currently perform surgical abortions and have privileges at a hospital within an hour's drive of their offices. To enforce these restrictions, the FDA would likely have to create a national registry of mifepristone-prescribing doctors, putting RU-486 in an exclusive regulatory category now occupied by extremely dangerous drugs like thalidomide.

This might make sense if mifepristone were, in fact, dangerous. But it isn't. Half a million European women have taken the drug since 1988. The lone fatality among them—a mother of twelve children, who smoked heavily and had a history of cardiac problems—occurred when the drug was administered with a prostaglandin shot, a procedure physicians phased out in the early '90s. The FDA apparently justifies its proposed regulations on the grounds that complications, however rare, might warrant immediate medical attention. But this contradicts long-standing medical practice. After all, the government lets midwives deliver babies even though they cannot perform cesarean sections; they contact physicians when trouble arises. A similar requirement would be more than adequate for mifepristone. (In clinical trials, on those rare occasions when a woman suffered excessive bleeding that required a transfusion—out of 6,000 women who took part in ongoing trials in Rochester, New York, only three experienced this complication—she received prompt and successful treatment. The overall rate for complications has been less than five percent, the same as in Europe.)

But, if the FDA regulations would have little effect on safety, they would have a tremendous effect on access. Currently, abortions are available in fewer than one-fifth of American counties, and one in three gynecologists who do not perform surgical abortions have indicated they would administer the pill if they could. When they hear this, pro-lifers panic, imagining a skyrocketing abortion rate. But in Europe greater access has led not to more abortions (rates have stayed steady since RU-486 was legalized) but to earlier ones. And earlier abortions are, in fact, what Americans consistently say they want. Polls show that 65 percent of Americans support surgical abortion during the first trimester, a much higher number than support it during the second.

Of course, to the anti-abortion lobby, such distinctions are meaningless: taking innocent life is taking innocent life. But the argument that abortion is as noxious at six weeks as it is at six months is politically self-defeating, as the anti-abortion lobby itself knows. That's why in the late '90s, after a generation of futility, right-to-life organizations finally retook the political offensive by focusing on "partial-birth" abortion. The partial-birth campaign worked because it acknowledged implicitly what pro-lifers are loath to say outright: that some abortions are worse than others. In thus sacrificing their vaunted intellectual consistency, abortion opponents moved the debate from its polarized stalemate to a place where the law might actually encourage women to have safer abortions earlier in pregnancy. That shift was good for people who care about the unborn and good for people who care about women's freedom. That the pro-life movement, with its assault on mifepristone, has ceded that precious moral center is hardly surprising. But, from the administration that coined the phrase "safe, legal, and rare," one might have expected better. ■

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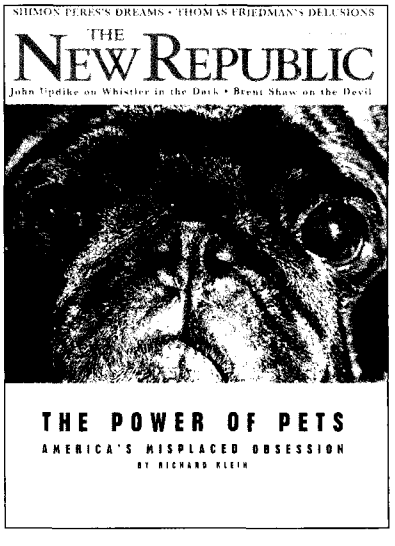
NOTEBOOK

CASH AND CARRY: Last week, as *The Washington Post*'s Lloyd Grove reported in his "Reliable Source" column, the Reverend Al Sharpton was spotted forking over $900 in cash to Baltimore's Harbor Court Hotel. "I was paying for several rooms for our staff," a defensive Sharpton later told the *Post*. "I didn't know cash was illegal. When you're on the road like I am, four or five times a week, sometimes you use cash so you don't jam your credit card." And Grove let that explanation be the last word. But he shouldn't have. Because the truth is that Sharpton probably doesn't even have a credit card. In fact, besides the relatively modest salary he receives from the nonprofit National Action Network, Sharpton appears to have virtually no visible assets. For instance, his Brooklyn home is in his wife's name; even his six-figure book advance was paid out to his wife. Why is Sharpton so afraid of allowing his wealth to show up on paper? Maybe it's because whatever money he has should be going to the courts. In 1998, Sharpton was successfully sued for defamation of character by Steven Pagones, one of the men he famously—and falsely—accused of raping Tawana Brawley. A jury ordered Sharpton to pay Pagones $65,000 in damages. But Sharpton didn't seem too concerned. "What's [Pagones] going to collect?" he told the *New York Post* shortly before the verdict. "I don't have any money." Indeed, Garry Bolnick, Pagones's attorney, says Sharpton didn't begin paying his client until March of this year, and only after Bolnick secured an income execution against Sharpton, extracting about $175 per week from the reverend's salary toward payment of his fine (which, with interest, now totals more than $85,000). But, Bolnick laments, that's the only money of Sharpton's he's been able to find: he can't locate any bank accounts or even a credit card in Sharpton's name. "If I could subpoena American Express, for example, and find out how he's paying his bills," Bolnick explains, "then I could 'attach' [i.e., seize] his bank accounts." Looks like Sharpton's been able to pull one over on people once again, not least among them the gossip columnist at *The Washington Post*.

AIRTIGHT: Almost from the moment EgyptAir Flight 990, en route from New York to Cairo, crashed into the Atlantic Ocean last fall, killing all 217 people aboard, the media has embraced the theory that co-pilot Gamael Batouti deliberately nosed the Boeing 767 into its fatal dive in order to commit suicide. Within days of the crash, American investigators leaked the suicide theory on the basis of the following arguments: Batouti was flying when the dive started; the dive began from a level cruise, and accidents that start at a level cruise are extremely rare; and Batouti uttered an Arabic prayer just as the emergency began. News reports eagerly bought into the suicide theory—what a story! Few added that the prayer Batouti said was the equivalent of a Christian pleading "God help me"; that Boeing has a huge financial stake in having the tragedy ascribed to a lunatic rather than to mechanical failure; or that U.S. aviation officials have a stake in showing that a foreign-trained pilot, not a U.S.-built product, is to blame. Still, caveats aside, the suicide theory seemed sound. But now it's looking less so, and the mainstream press doesn't seem concerned. Only the technical journal *Aviation Week and Space Technology*, known for its meticulous reporting of air disasters, has noted an essential fact from the crash investigation: Just after Flight 990 began its steep dive, Batouti "retarded," or pulled back on, the plane's throttles, which is exactly what pilots are taught to do in this situation. (A steep dive at forward throttle setting can cause excessive speed, which can stall the engines.) It's true that, just before the plane went into the final "graveyard spiral," Batouti and his captain seem to have been pushing in opposite directions on elevator controls, which regulate flight stability (the suicide theory holds that this shows Batouti was fighting the captain's rescue effort). But just a moment before that they were cooperating on a restart sequence for the engines, which seems to indicate that both men were trying to save the plane. Moreover, although U.S. investigators have asserted there is no evidence of mechanical problems in the EgyptAir wreckage, now it turns out that another 767, this one owned by Aeromexico, once experienced a dangerous failure in its elevator system. Indeed, other Boeing planes have also experienced severe control problems: the Boeing 737s that crashed in 1991 at Colorado Springs and in 1994 near Pittsburgh went down because rudder failure caused sudden dives and pilots were confused about which way to push the controls. Sound familiar? After these crashes, it was years before U.S. investigators acknowledged that the 737 had a problem with its rudder and ordered fixes. Maybe this time no such fixes are in order. But, if the major media don't start weighing the evidence more seriously, we may never find out.

MAN MISSES DOG: In recent years, visitors to THE NEW REPUBLIC's offices have remarked upon many peculiarities, but surely the most pleasant one was the calming, sniffing presence of a little black pug named Stuff Smith (pictured below). We are very sad to announce that the *éminence noire* known as Stuffy died on June 14, leaving this magazine all too human.


SHIMON PERES'S DREAMS • THOMAS FRIEDMAN'S DELUSIONS
THE
NEW REPUBLIC
John Updike on Whistler in the Dark • Brent Shaw on the Devil
THE POWER OF PETS
AMERICA'S MISPLACED OBSESSION
BY RICHARD KLEIN

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IF YOU CAN'T SAY ANYTHING NICE: Arizona Senator John McCain has a long record of opposing pork-barrel spending. Of course, most politicians say they're against pork, but McCain backs up his words with action, and he is eloquent in connecting his anti-pork stance with his belief in a greater national good that transcends narrow interests. It's a little surprising, then, to see him praising a fellow Republican's pork-winning abilities. Spencer Abraham, a GOP Senator from Michigan facing a tough reelection battle, has put up a new TV ad called "Fair Share." It features McCain saying, "I remember, during the highway bill, Spence was really fighting for Michigan." Could this be the same highway bill that McCain said three years ago "demonstrates how badly skewed are Congress's spending priorities" by "robbing from veterans to pay for pork-barrel spending"? The Arizona senator, it seems, is better at remembering how Abraham reacted to the highway bill than how he did himself.

SAME OLD STORY: "It's bigger than just Bill Richardson," Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott huffed last week about the missing nuclear computer files at New Mexico's Los Alamos Laboratory. By "bigger," Lott was trying to tar Bill Clinton as well. But Lott's words were truer than he realized. Security at Los Alamos, it turns out, was pretty bad even before the current draft-dodging, security-sneering crowd took over the White House. So bad, in fact, that in 1988, when Ronald Reagan was busy fighting the cold war, the General Accounting Office discovered that the lab hadn't even bothered to do background checks on 65 percent of visitors from Communist countries. That same year, a technician with high-level security clearance was arrested at the lab for possession of marijuana with the intent to sell after police found 200 pounds of it in his truck. Computer data at Los Alamos has also been vulnerable for some time, with hackers breaking into the system and accessing files in well-publicized incidents dating from 1983. Bigger than Richardson? Indeed.

HAS ANYONE TOLD LIONEL TRILLING?: "Liberal activist Fulani withdraws support of Buchanan" —The Associated Press, June 19. ■

VINT'S WEEK

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Bill Richardson, masochist.

The Doormat

By Franklin Foer

As the Clinton administration nears its close, the time has arrived to assess the carnage. Partisans will recall the travails of Lani Guinier or Linda Tripp or Webster Hubbell. But neutral observers can surely agree that the misfortunes of these three pale in comparison to those of the Clinton White House's foremost victim: Bill Richardson.

At a glance, of course, President Clinton would seem Richardson's beneficent patron. During his first term, the president encouraged the New Mexico congressman's efforts at freelance diplomacy, sending him to international hot spots—North Korea, Sudan, Serbia—for high-profile negotiations. Then, in 1997, Clinton plucked Richardson from the drudgery of the House Transportation and Hazardous Materials Subcommittee and named him ambassador to the United Nations—a job that comes with a penthouse apartment at the Waldorf-Astoria. Not long after that, Clinton named him secretary of energy. Along the way, Richardson became a star. The commentariat breathlessly hyped his future. Operatives whispered his name as a likely running mate for Vice President Al Gore—a rumor Richardson did little to discourage.

But last week it all came tumbling down. With the revelation of yet another security lapse at the Energy Department's Los Alamos nuclear laboratory—this time, two computer hard drives containing nuclear secrets mysteriously disappeared for at least a month, only to mysteriously reappear behind a photocopier—Richardson's political future seems to have gone up in smoke. Republicans are licking their chops. "[If] he had been doing his job as secretary . . . and not [been] out running for vice president," the Los Alamos mess could have been avoided, griped Alabama Senator Richard Shelby. Even normally humorless pundits are using Richardson to score a laugh. "His vice presidential prospects have sunk now to probably somewhere between Bob Novak and Dr. Laura," quipped Al Hunt on CNN's "Capital Gang." When Richardson's name appears in the papers these days, it's often because someone is demanding his resignation.

But the Los Alamos scandal is only the latest in Richardson's extraordinary run of Clinton-inflicted humiliations. With each ascension up the Washington hierarchy, with each ratcheting up of his star power, Richardson has arrived just in time to bear the blame for another administration debacle. Indeed, by hitching his star to Clinton—a man who never takes the heat himself—Richardson has sealed his fate as a broken pol.

ERIC PALMA

How exactly has Clinton given poor Richardson the shaft? First, there's Monica. When the president needed to get his girlfriend a job in New York, he turned to two of his most loyal fixers—Richardson and Vernon Jordan. Within days of a phone call from Deputy Chief of Staff John Podesta, Richardson offered Lewinsky a job at the United Nations. Did he know he was being used to quell a bimbo eruption? Probably not, but it doesn't really matter. Richardson will always be tainted by the scandal.

So did Clinton reward Richardson's service with a job the rotund New Mexican wanted? No. According to associates of Richardson's, Clinton forced him into taking a job he didn't really want at all. In a bind because Federico Peña's resignation as secretary of energy had left his Cabinet's Hispanic slot empty—and in need of a high-profile foreign policy appointment for Richard Holbrooke—Clinton asked Richardson to leave the United Nations and take over at the Department of Energy.

While nominally a promotion for Richardson, secretary of energy is actually the worst job in Washington. Not only does the post have a narrow mandate, covering such sexy

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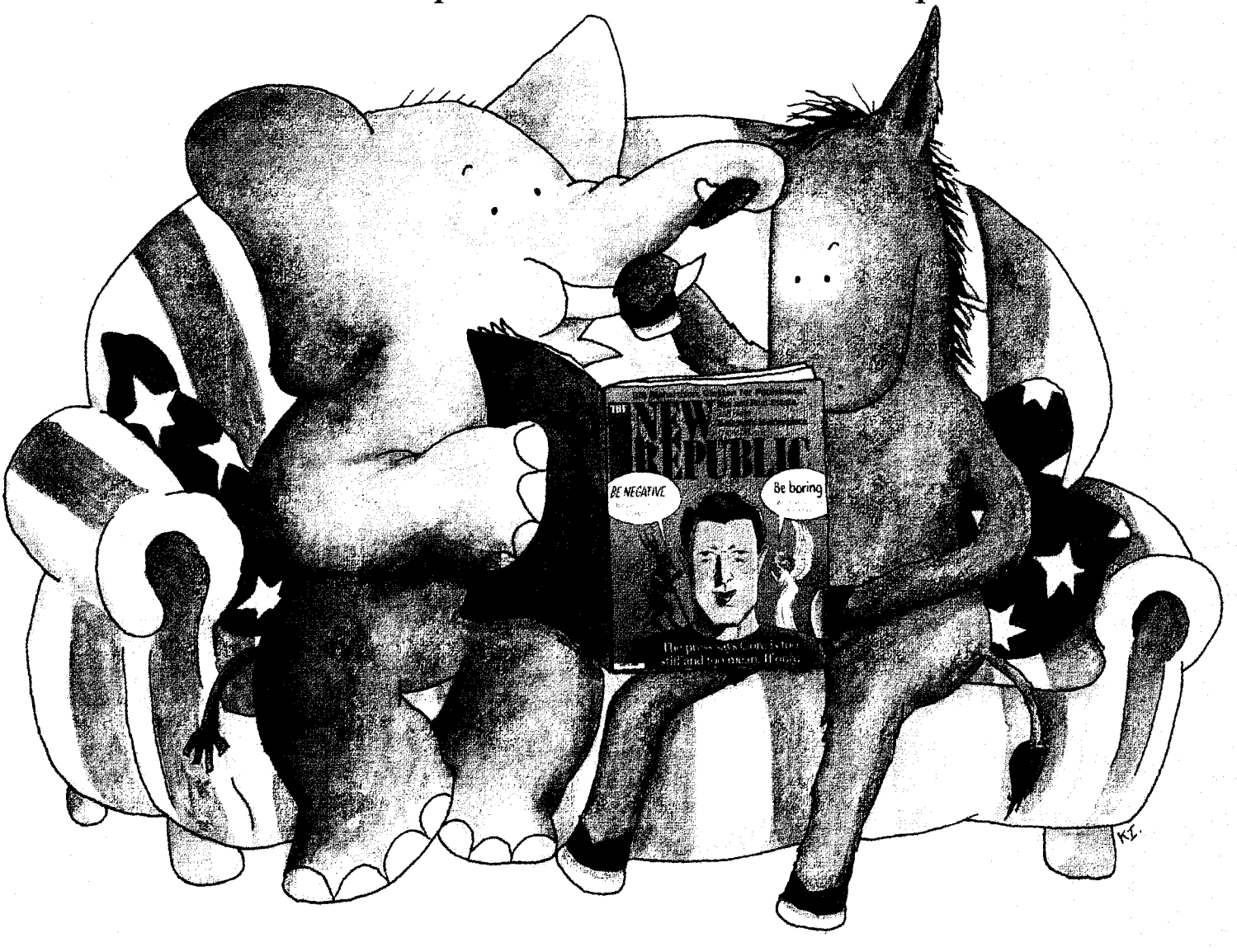

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subjects as nuclear waste and solar energy, but the secretary presides over the most inept bureaucrats in the land. (When Jimmy Carter created the department in 1977, federal agencies used the occasion to send it their least likable, least competent apparatchiks.) Richardson privately expressed grave doubts about taking the DOE job. His friends warned him that the department would be a thankless hellhole, especially compared to his cushy gig at the United Nations. After all, the DOE is so disastrous that most of its secretaries, no matter how able, depart in a haze of scandal. Most are never heard from again. But Richardson, always loyal, quietly complied with his boss's orders.

Of course, the inevitable happened. The DOE has proved to be a disaster. For one thing, there are the issues in Richardson's ambit. As energy secretary, Richardson serves as the administration's point man on oil prices. It's a suicidal mission: Richardson's job provides him with zero statutory power to alleviate the rising cost of oil, sue big oil companies for price-fixing, or make OPEC roll over and change its policy. But he's nonetheless the one who takes the blame for rising gas costs. To put Richardson's predicament another way: Thanks to the White House, when angry men pump gas as pricey as Starbucks coffee in the heat of summer, they'll conjure Richardson's visage.

And then there are the obstreperous idiots who dot his department—the people who brought you the Los Alamos fiascoes. How do you deal with chowderheads who let their employees take home disks filled with nuclear secrets? Or fail to report missing disks for 24 days? Not that Richardson hasn't tried. When a 1997 report by a highly respected intelligence expert recommended 26 steps to prevent another security breakdown, Richardson agreed to implement them all. He reprimanded his deputies, including the former director of Los Alamos. Richardson balked only once, at a proposal to create an independent agency to supervise DOE security. He rightly argued that this agency would usurp many of his powers. Still, he ended up endorsing the proposal anyway.

Perhaps Richardson himself deserves some of the blame for his predicament. Too eager to please, he constantly agrees to run fool's errands for his boss. A cynic might even call him a lickspittle. But is this such a horrible thing? Richardson fits into an honorable lineage of lickspittles—Washington insiders who take on tough jobs at their own political peril. Think of Henry Cabot Lodge becoming ambassador to Vietnam in 1963 or Howard Baker becoming Reagan's chief of staff at the height of the Iran-Contra affair. Like Richardson, both of these men deserved to be vice president—if only as reparation for getting screwed.

But now that Richardson looks like he'll be watching the 2000 presidential election from the sidelines, perhaps he can turn his attention to regaining office in New Mexico—maybe trying to become governor. After all, he's expended considerable energy maintaining connections with his old cronies. Then again, Clinton may have doomed him to failure even there. The White House has already forced Richardson to store nuclear waste in New Mexico. And then last month, with a little help from the Interior Department, Clinton outdid himself in his odd campaign to destroy his supposed friend: he burned down the poor guy's state. ■

Quiet diplomacy fails in Iran.

Silent Scream

By SETH GITELL

IN MAY, 13 Iranian Jews were put on trial before the Revolutionary Court in Shiraz on charges of spying for Israel. The charges echoed the Soviet Union's against Natan Sharansky and other refuseniks in the 1980s, charges that in 1987 prompted 200,000 Americans to take to the National Mall in protest. So you might think American Jews would be taking to the streets again today.

You'd think wrong. This time, the American Jewish community has largely stayed quiet—at least in public. At the behest of Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations and the man who has coordinated the community's efforts on behalf of the 13, American Jewish groups have eschewed large public demonstrations in favor of behind-the-scenes diplomacy.

Hoenlein and others say the backroom approach has paid off. Thanks to pressure from various governments and nonprofit organizations, they note, the imprisoned Jews have been given kosher food, visitation rights, and legal representation for their trial before the Revolutionary Court, something almost unheard-of in Iran. But those are about the only concessions Iran has made. Not only has Tehran maintained the charges against the 13, it has subjected them to a grossly unfair judicial process marked by secret proceedings and coerced confessions. And if the Revolutionary Court, which is expected to rule any day now, finds the defendants guilty, they may face life in prison or even death. It's nice to have kosher food, but not if it's served as a last meal.

To be fair, American Jewish groups are in a bit of a quandary. Public demonstrations against Tehran, Jewish leaders and the prisoners' families fear, could provoke reprisals against not only the 13 defendants but also the 30,000 other Jews still living in Iran. "We cannot afford to create a circumstance that endangers them," says Hoenlein.

Instead, Jewish groups have placed their trust in the Clinton administration's quiet diplomacy. But that trust has produced precious few results, and Jewish groups haven't done much to hold the administration's feet to the fire. At the same time that President Clinton and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright have called on Iran to release the prisoners, the administration has also been seeking warmer relations with the Islamic republic. And, more often than not, the latter agenda has carried the day. In a March 17 speech, for instance, Albright paid lip service to the plight of the defendants in a strange, passively worded passage: "Governments

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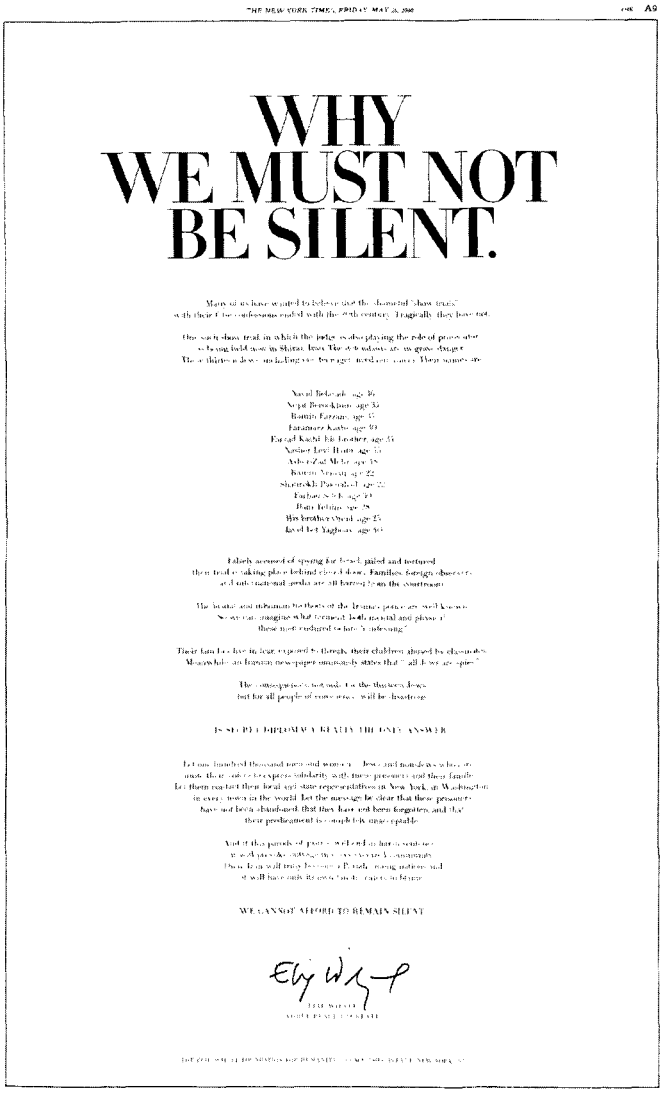
around the world, including our own, have expressed concern ... for thirteen Iranian Jews, who were detained for more than a year without official charge and are now scheduled for trial next month. We look to the procedures and the results of this trial as one of the barometers of U.S.-Iran relations." Then, without waiting to see what the reading on the barometer would be, Albright graciously announced that the United States would lift sanctions on such Iranian goods as pistachio nuts, Persian rugs, and caviar. As part of the administration's charm offensive toward Tehran, Albright even volunteered that "the United States must bear its fair share of responsibility for the problems that have arisen in U.S.-Iranian relations."



WHY
WE MUST NOT
BE SILENT.

WE CANNOT AFFORD TO REMAIN SILENT

After failing to convince the Clintonites to condition the lifting of sanctions on the release of the imprisoned 13, American Jewish officials privately pooh-poohed the decision as no big deal. While the Anti-Defamation League and the Conference of Presidents both officially criticized the lifting of sanctions, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), the pro-Israel lobby, didn't even bother with a public condemnation. Neither did the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, whose silence stood in stark contrast to the statement it issued two months earlier, on January 11, the fourth anniversary of American Lori Berenson's imprisonment for aiding a terrorist revolutionary group in Peru: "Today, in cities across the nation, in search of justice for Lori, we come together to say: enough. Let our message be clear: To President Fujimori and the Government of Peru we say: Lori's trial was a sham, her conviction is unsupported, and her treatment has been unjust."

One reason for the Jewish community's failure to influence the Clinton administration seems to have been, ironically, its refusal to rally public protest. Without visible demonstrations, the administration didn't fear a popular backlash against the sanctions decision. As Pooya Dayanim, a Los Angeles-based attorney who serves as spokesman for the Council of Iranian-American Jewish Organizations, puts it, "Wider knowledge of the American public and greater grassroots outreach would have enabled us to approach the administration to take a harder approach on this. This is an administration that is very eager to improve relations with Iran. That has harmed some of our efforts." Quiet diplomacy alone also failed to stop the World Bank from approving a $200 million loan to modernize Iran's sewage system, a carrot Jewish groups had hoped the bank would use to convince Tehran to free the prisoners.

In the face of these failures, the patience of some in the American Jewish community has begun to wear thin. In March, Democratic Representative Brad Sherman of California went to the House floor to denounce the lifting of sanctions, declaring, "There is blood in the caviar, bodies have been wrapped in the carpets, and it is time for America to say no until the thirteen Jews of Shiraz are liberated." Sherman was particularly upset that others in the Jewish community weren't similarly critical. "I believe strongly that we should have decried the change in the import rules," he says.

More importantly, Rabbi Avi Weiss, national president of the Coalition for Jewish Concerns-Amcha, has organized rallies and prayer vigils, over the objections of Hoenlein and others, in front of the Iranian Mission to the United Nations in New York. (Ten rabbis were arrested at a Weiss-led protest on May 3.) The Simon Wiesenthal Center, along with members of the Iranian Jewish community, has held similar gatherings on the West Coast. In May, Elie Wiesel even placed an ad in *The New York Times* asking, "Is secret diplomacy really the only answer?"

The more aggressive approach has begun to pay dividends. On June 6, a group of American Jews, including Weiss and several other New York-area rabbis, met with the senior consul of the Iranian Mission to the United Nations. "Part of the reason that we've had these official meetings is that we've gone public," Weiss contends.

And the public approach may be winning converts even among those who initially opposed it. If the 13 are found guilty and given harsh sentences, some Jewish officials who initially backed quiet diplomacy say they will support large-scale demonstrations. "I am not reluctant to go to the streets," says Hoenlein, whose Conference of Presidents has recently sanctioned some low-key prayer vigils near the United Nations, "but you have to know when each response is appropriate." The danger is that by the time Hoenlein deems going to the streets appropriate, it may already be too late. ■

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Why doesn't the press believe Tony Coelho?

Ill-Conceived

By Benjamin Soskis

You probably do not want to know the details of diverticulitis. It's one of those maladies whose polysyllabic consonance says quite enough: it afflicts the bowels and can be very painful. In its most extreme form, it can lead to fever, nausea, intestinal bleeding, and potentially fatal infection. In 1987, it sent Jamaican Prime Minister Michael Manley to the hospital for weeks; in 1996, a serious case nearly killed the actor Liam Neeson.

And last week Tony Coelho cited it as a reason for his resignation as chairman of Vice President Al Gore's presidential campaign. Coelho, an epileptic, had also suffered several recent stress-related seizures, and doctors told him the fits would increase in frequency if he did not alter his frenetic work schedule. The physicians placed Coelho on a six-week liquid diet, ordered tests for colon cancer—often initially misdiagnosed as diverticulitis—and suggested that he "slow down, eat better, and travel less for a period of time." As Coelho pointed out in a statement, issued from his hospital bed, "None of this advice is consistent with the rigors of chairing a presidential campaign."

Sound reasonable? Not to a chorus of pundits who claimed they smelled *tactics* in Coelho's announcement. Citing widespread rumors that Coelho had fallen out of favor, the pundits practically accused him of faking. "This is not a health reason, this is a political reason," announced Tony Blankley on "The McLaughlin Group." "I think this is a convenient way for Al Gore to, once again, shake up a campaign that has been marred by some infighting," chirped NBC's Norah O'Donnell. "[Coelho] had too much baggage to carry, and they had to get rid of him," Robert Novak kvetched on CNN. "I wish politicians would say the truth."

The press is often chided for its reflexive cynicism. Journalists are still concocting fantastic scenarios to explain why rising Republican star Bill Paxon left the House two years ago, since the explanation he provided—he wanted to spend more time with his family—obviously can't be trusted. But, as with grade-school gym instructors, that cynicism seems to reach its peak when it comes to medical excuses.

Consider New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani and his recent health problems. In April, when Giuliani announced that he had been diagnosed with prostate cancer and was trying to figure out whether he could run for the Senate while simultaneously undergoing the necessary treatment, journalists speculated that the mayor was *really* contemplating whether or not a Senate seat actually suited him. "I was struck today by the fact that Giuliani said his focus is going to be on his health and what's best for him," noted MSNBC's Andrea Mitchell. "You know, many [journalists] have felt all along that he was a bit ambivalent about this race.... Maybe this is a graceful way out." The *New York Post* was even blunter: the day the mayor announced he was dropping out of the race because of his illness, the paper declared, "BOTTOM LINE: HE DIDN'T REALLY WANT THE JOB." The idea that Giuliani really was scared out of his wits by the disease that ended his father's life—that he was thinking about his health, not about whether he minded sharing power with 99 other politicians—barely crossed anyone's mind.

Part of this strange refusal to take health seriously as a force in people's lives (or at least as a force equal to political ambition) derives from the exigencies of campaign journalism itself. The campaign trail holds a special attraction for workaholics—those willing to live out of suitcases, separate themselves from loved ones, and crash in motel rooms night after night, all in the pursuit of journalistic glory. "You're working every waking hour," *Newsweek* correspondent Matt Bai commented recently. Little wonder, then, that the press showed scant pity for Texas Governor George W. Bush when he complained about missing his family, his house, his comfy bed, and his pet cat Ernie. Slowing down, eating better, and traveling less are simply not options for reporters. So why should they be for the politicians they cover?

During the primary season, for instance, when a whole crew of journalists covering Arizona Senator John McCain's presidential campaign came down with a nasty case of the flu (a *Washington Post* story described the Straight Talk Express as "a roiling petri dish of infection"), few abandoned ship. "I started throwing up in some horrible place in South Carolina," one of the journalists afflicted recalls. "But there's nothing you can do. You have to stay on."

And then there's the growing disconnect between the youth of the press and the maturity of those they cover. More and more, the "boys on the bus" really are boys (and girls). Journalists on the campaign trail tend to be mostly twenty- and thirtysomethings, partly because they are the only people whose bodies can withstand takeout Chinese food and four hours of sleep a night for weeks on end. It's no surprise that campaign staff members have even begun affecting the rhetoric of a dorm mother: Bush officials recently handed out a press schedule with the heading "First double overnight in two weeks! Do your laundry!" Indeed, a recent story in the *New York Post* celebrated the campaign trail as a slightly more incestuous version of MTV's "The Real World," "a meat market," and "a frat party"—in other words, the kinds of environments populated by folks who snicker when they see Depends commercials.

Fortunately, there's at least one journalist on the trail who still respects conditions like diverticulitis. As news of Coelho's resignation broke last week, this journalist made the talk-show rounds, declaring Coelho's ill health "a legitimate excuse," "a serious potential problem," and "not something that they concocted just to deal with" Gore's flagging campaign. And who was this unjaded soul among the cynics in the greenroom? Someone who's seen enough of life to know that the body ultimately fails: *Washington Post* septuagenarian David Broder. ■

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Berlin Dispatch

Girlz II Men

By Steve Kettmann

Andreas Krieger could have testified without words. He could have stood there in the small, boxy Berlin courtroom in cowboy boots, jeans, and a black T-shirt and let everyone stare. In the trial of 74-year-old Manfred Ewald, the former head of East Germany's Olympic program, and Dr. Manfred Höppner, the program's former medical director, Krieger's maleness was testimony enough.

As a 21-year-old woman named Heidi Krieger, Andreas Krieger told the court, he competed in the shot put for the East German Olympic team. Able to lift 260 kilograms (573 pounds), he recalled, Heidi once punched out a boxer who had gotten on her nerves. "Arnold Schwarzenegger was a *Waisenknabe*"—an innocent orphan—"compared to me," Krieger said. But, over time, Heidi's strength became a weakness. "I was no longer Heidi Krieger," the former shot-putter testified one morning in late May. "I didn't know anymore who I was.... The pills accelerated any transsexual tendencies I may already have had. I wasn't able to identify with my body anymore, and that led me to undergo a sex change in 1997."

For two months now, on Tuesdays and Fridays, the damaged female products of East Germany's sports machine—142 named plaintiffs in all—have come to this Berlin courtroom to offer the German public a gripping, at times horrifying look at what that machine wrought. Many of the women have told of growing excessive body hair; 40 developed deeper voices; 15 experienced gynecological problems, including infertility or miscarriage; and the breasts of six disappeared. Some gave birth to children with various defects, like clubfeet. All said they wished they had known more about the "vitamins" they were given in the form of injections or little blue pills. Those "vitamins," they now know, were steroids.

As Wolf Biermann, the Bob Dylan of Germany, once put it, the East German Olympic program was "a large-scale animal experiment on living people." "There is not a single day without pain," testified former discus-thrower Brigitte Michel. "We looked like men and talked like men," former shot-put champion Simone Machalett told the court. Said former world-record-holding swimmer Carola Beraktschjan: "It's terrifying, what they did to us.... I took up to thirty pills a day. They always told us they were vitamins. There was no question you would not take them. You had to play by the rules.... We were vehicles chosen to prove that socialism was better than capitalism. What happened to our bodies was entirely secondary to that political mission led by Ewald."

Manfred Ewald learned political fanaticism early, first as a member of the Hitler Youth and later as a National Socialist. He became a member of the East German Communist Party's central committee in 1963, took over the country's Olympic program the following year, and conceived and oversaw the national doping program that flourished in the 1970s and '80s. A close associate of German Democratic Republic leader Erich Honecker, Ewald saw his sports machine as a vehicle for convincing the world of East Germany's greatness. During the 27 years he headed its sports program, the GDR, a country of just 17 million people, won an incredible 160 gold medals. It wracked up an astounding 40 at the 1976 Montreal Games alone, double its total four years earlier, which prompted American swimmer Shirley Babashoff to comment to the East German coach on his swimmers' deep, husky voices. The coach famously replied, "We have come to swim, not to sing."

LLOYD MILLER

Stasi files opened after the fall of the Berlin Wall confirmed Babashoff's and others' worst suspicions. In the case against Ewald and Höppner—which, given a soon-to-expire statute of limitations, will likely be one of the last cases to arise from the human rights abuses chronicled in those files—the two men are accused of giving steroids to girls as young as eleven. Prosecutors say Ewald reprimanded for "cowardice" scientists who worried about the drugs' potential side effects. Ewald allegedly told the hundreds of people working for him that "everything is allowed" in order to boost performance.

That mindset, as much as Ewald himself—who, if guilty, could face up to eight years in

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prison—is what's on trial here. While all decent people condemn what he did, his influence remains powerful, and not only in the former GDR. Ewald's disciples, whether they know it or not, include a large portion of the world's top athletes.

Just this month, Dr. Wade Exum, the United States Olympic Committee's top drug-testing official, resigned in protest, charging that the USOC, in the run-up to this summer's Olympic Games in Sydney, was "deliberately encouraging the doping of athletes without considering the consequences to the health." Even much-admired St. Louis Cardinals slugger Mark McGwire is something of an Ewald disciple: Androstenedione, the testosterone booster he took the year he broke Roger Maris's home-run record (he has since stopped taking it), was first isolated by European scientists in the 1930s. But it took Ewald's sports machine to put "Andro" on the map, developing it in the late '80s as a so-called bridging drug to tide over East German athletes when they had to stop taking steroids prior to being tested at competitions.

"It's not important that you can say Ewald or Höppner must go to jail for a month or whatever," said Michel. "What's important is that there is a process that will make this public. For me that's very personal. It is important to teach people how to think about steroids and their dangers. In all the disciplines of sports, you need power and energy. But steroids are a time bomb. They are always dangerous. I would tell athletes around the world, 'Keep yourself off steroids.' I hope they pay attention." ■

East Africa Dispatch

False Dawn

By LARA SANTORO

THIS MONTH, FOR the third time in less than a year, Uganda and Rwanda—once partners in the military campaign to overthrow the government of neighboring Congo—turned their guns on each other in Kisangani, eastern Congo's largest city. For the third time, under international pressure, the two countries announced a truce. And, for the third time, each blamed the other for the bloody combat that has virtually destroyed the city and killed or injured hundreds of Congolese civilians. Now, as in the past, Uganda and Rwanda claim their cease-fire will hold. But, even if the two countries follow through on their announced withdrawal from Kisangani, their mutual animosity will probably just erupt into violence somewhere else. They are already reinforcing their positions in the eastern Congolese province of North Kivu.

The Uganda-Rwanda conflict is not only brutal; it is also petty. From its inception last year, the violence has been driven almost entirely by a growing jealousy between the two governments and a personal animosity between their military commanders in Congo. The fighting is ideological in only a single sense, and an unusual one. Several years ago, the Clinton administration—with the gushing approval of many in the American press—began hailing a "new breed" of African technocrats who were gaining ground on old-style kleptocrats like Congo's Mobutu Sese Seko and Kenya's Daniel arap Moi. The United States directed its foreign aid, including substantial military aid, toward these new pragmatic, free-market, liberal-minded leaders. Uganda's Yoweri Museveni and Rwanda's Paul Kagame were Exhibits A and B, and President Clinton chose Uganda and Rwanda as two of the six countries he visited during his spring 1998 trip to Africa. But, while Museveni and Kagame may represent an improvement over horrors such as Mobutu and Moi, calling them technocrats was deluded. In fact, both are former guerrilla leaders who seized power by force. So the Uganda-Rwanda conflict is ideological in the sense that the Clinton administration and other Western governments—convinced that Museveni and Kagame represented a fundamentally different kind of African leader—imagined that showering the two countries with weapons would stabilize east-central Africa. It has, of course, done the opposite.

THE ROOTS OF the now-defunct Uganda-Rwanda military alliance date from the 1960s, when persecuted Rwandan Tutsis fled north and joined then-guerrilla leader Museveni's civil war against the government of Uganda. When Museveni took power in 1986, the Rwandans were integrated into the new Ugandan army.

Ever since, Ugandan military leaders have viewed Rwandan soldiers as the awkward adolescents they trained in the bush. But this view no longer corresponds to reality. In 1990, thousands of Rwandan soldiers left Uganda to overthrow the government of their own country. Four years later they succeeded, and, still plagued by the genocidal Hutu leadership they overthrew, they have not stopped fighting since.

Ten years of nonstop fighting has transformed the Rwandans into the most fearsome military force in east-central Africa. Their prowess became apparent when Uganda and Rwanda forged an alliance to overthrow Congo's Mobutu in 1996. And it has become even clearer since the two countries turned their arms against each other. Earlier this month, Rwandan forces scored a third consecutive victory over their former Ugandan allies in Kisangani, pushing the Ugandans across the Tshopo River and out of the city.

But Uganda, which still sees itself as the senior partner in the now-defunct coalition, remains unwilling and unable to accept Rwanda's new military superiority. James Kazini, Uganda's army chief of staff, recently captured this sentiment with a dismissive comment about James Kabarebe, chief of Rwandan operations in Congo. "Why do we even bother with him?" Kazini said. "He's only a second lieutenant." The insult was emblematic: Kabarebe was indeed a second lieutenant when he left the Ugandan army in 1990. But over the subsequent decade he has risen to the rank of colonel and become one of the driving forces behind Rwanda's military gains in Congo.

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"We have told the Ugandans, 'Shed your ego,' but they can't," says Emmanuel Ndahiro, Rwandan army spokesman and a close aide to Kagame. "It's a reality they are not able to accept." Ugandan officers, for their part, say they cannot bear Rwanda's newfound arrogance. "They don't own Congo; they don't own Kisangani," a Ugandan intelligence official said last month. "But they behave as if they did."

NOWHERE ARE THESE animosities more evident than in the deep hostility between Lieutenant Colonel Patrick Nyamvumba, the original Rwandan commander in Kisangani, and Kazini, his Ugandan counterpart. Kazini, the higher-ranking officer, expected from Nyamvumba a degree of deference and respect. He received neither.

Nyamvumba didn't drink and hardly talked except to give orders. Like many Rwandans, he suffered greatly during his army's years of nonstop warfare—one leg was blown out from under him at age 23—and he expected the same discipline and devotion from his colleagues. Kazini, by contrast, was a drinker known to be genial, charming, and open to debate. "I get up at six in the morning," explained Nyamvumba, who was removed from Congo in an effort to ease tensions. "Kazini gets up at two in the afternoon after drinking all night. He is free to schedule his meetings at one o'clock in the morning if he wants, but I'm not going to be there."

The differences between the two men reflect the cultural differences between their armies. Rwandans are frequently compared to Israelis. Still traumatized by a genocide that claimed an estimated 75 percent of the Tutsi population, the Rwandan troops are fanatically disciplined and deeply insular—both of which make them appear cold and contemptuous, at least to outsiders. At night, rather than join their Ugandan colleagues in drunken outings, they virtuously keep to their barracks. Rwandan soldiers are trained to march 50 kilometers a day, twice the speed of most armies. Although generally outnumbered, they have never lost a pitched battle.

It was the genocide that led to Rwanda's intervention in Congo in the first place. In 1994, Rwanda's Hutu government—with the support of the army, the military police, and a paramilitary group called the Interahamwe ("those who fight together")—killed 800,000 Tutsis before being defeated by the Rwandan Patriotic Front, the precursor of today's Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA). Eventually, the Hutu leadership regrouped in refugee camps just across the border in eastern Congo and waited for an opportunity to invade Rwanda and finish the job. When Mobutu sheltered the Hutu exiles, 5,000 RPA troops essentially walked the width of Congo—almost 1,000 miles—in cheap galoshes before they captured Kinshasa and helped install Laurent Kabila as president. When Kabila later turned on them, the Rwandans went to war against him as well.

Uganda's Congo intervention was driven by less apocalyptic security concerns: the Allied Democratic Forces, a guerrilla group determined to overthrow the Ugandan government, had also found sanctuary in the dense forests of eastern Congo. But, in contrast to the Rwandans, the Ugandan army in Congo seemed to lose sight of its military objectives, rarely engaging in combat. The Ugandan press accused senior officers of large-scale looting of Congolese gold, diamonds, coffee, timber, and palm oil. According to R. Mokeni Ekopi Kane, president of the Federation of Congolese Enterprises in Kisangani, Ugandan commander Kazini is "more interested in diamonds than in war."

IF ONLY INDIVIDUAL animosity, cultural differences, and wounded pride fueled the Uganda-Rwanda conflict, the blame would rest on those countries alone. But the truth is more complex. In democratic societies, personal feuds are not legitimate grounds for war. But Uganda and Rwanda are not democratic—Museveni and Kagame are former guerrilla leaders accustomed to achieving their political objectives through violence. What is surprising is not the reckless way in which the two men are using their militaries but America's belief that it could safely build up those militaries because Museveni and Kagame were leading an African renaissance based on economic development, not war. (Two other leaders of that supposed renaissance, Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi and Eritrean President Isaias Afewerki, have also gone to war against each other in the last year, in a conflict that has claimed more than 100,000 lives.)

In Rwanda, Western wishful thinking has been exacerbated by Western guilt over the world's failure to stop the 1994 genocide. Rwanda would never have been able to spend the last five years building up its military had it not received millions of dollars of unconditional aid from Western donors. "I think there's been an element of guilt," notes Suliman Baldo, a researcher for Human Rights Watch. "The international community did nothing to stop the genocide, despite clear signals. Now there is a sense that they are still struggling for their survival. How do you limit a survivor's defensive capacity?"

But Rwanda's capacity ceased to be merely defensive long ago, and its new military might is matched by a national arrogance that Uganda cannot bear. Museveni has even vowed that, if necessary, he will mobilize "twenty-two million Ugandans"—the country's entire population—to fight his smaller neighbor to the south. And, while there are few concrete indications that the conflict will immediately spread to the Ugandan-Rwandan border, Uganda may continue the conflict by proxy, possibly through a tacit alliance with the Interahamwe, the genocidal army Rwanda is trying to uproot in Congo. Sources in Kigali say they have evidence that a few months ago Ugandan army commanders met with elements of the Interahamwe, prompting fears that Uganda might allow the guerrillas to use its border to infiltrate Rwanda. Should such an arrangement be established, Rwanda would almost certainly declare war on its former ally.

In other words, if the West doesn't begin to undo the damage it has wrought, the conflict may flare out of control. Foreign donors need to start promoting peace in the same way they unwittingly promoted war: through foreign aid. Both Uganda and Rwanda are heavily dependent on outside assistance. In Rwanda's case, at least 45 percent of the country's national budget comes from international lenders. Today,

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too much of that aid can be diverted toward war efforts. Last year, for instance, Great Britain pledged $70 million in unrestrained funding for Rwanda over the next decade.

Following the latest round of fighting, the West has finally begun to pressure the two combatants. In mid-June, the U.N. Security Council passed a resolution condemning the fighting in Kisangani, and the U.S. State Department is considering penalizing military accounts in Uganda and Rwanda. It's a start, but it's not enough. If the two countries renege on their promise to withdraw from Kisangani or if they begin fighting elsewhere, the United States, the European Union, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund should suspend all aid. For the Clinton administration and other Western governments to brand as outlaws nations they once lavishly praised would be an embarrassing reversal. But it would signal a shift that is long, and tragically, overdue—a willingness to see the governments of Uganda and Rwanda for what they are rather than what we wish they were. ■

Jack Quinn 1, Bill Clinton 0.

The Mighty Quinn

By David Grann

It was close to midnight as Bill Clinton worked the rope line, his eyes slightly puffy. He'd flown to Albany, New York, earlier that evening to stand by his wife, Hillary, as she accepted the state Democratic Party's Senate nomination. Now, in the hotel afterward, people pressed toward the president, trying to get his autograph, his hand, his attention. The room was full of state and county chairmen, party delegates, and representatives—all the people whose support Hillary needs to win. "Then there were people like me who just happened to get in," says John Fee.

Only a few weeks earlier, the 26-year-old entrepreneur had announced his candidacy for Congress in New York's Thirtieth District. He had no name recognition in the state and no standing in the party. Indeed, the last elected office he had held was president of his class at Tufts University.

As Clinton approached, the slightly built Fee pushed forward anxiously, hoping to meet his political idol. The president grabbed his outstretched palm with one hand while still holding someone else's with the other, and he was about to let go when Fee shouted: "I'm John Fee. I'm running for Congress against Jack Quinn." As Fee recalls, the president suddenly stopped and turned around, pulling the rookie candidate closer. Ignoring the other hands clutching at him, Clinton focused intently on Fee's boyish face. Quinn had broken a promise and betrayed him, the president said, his voice rising with bitterness. He spoke animatedly, throwing out bits of advice about the district and how it could be won. Finally, as he returned to the sea of arms, he told Fee, "I think you can do it. I think you can get him."

Next to Rick Lazio, there is probably no congressman in America Bill Clinton wants to see lose in the fall elections as much as Jack Quinn. An Irish Catholic who used to work in the steel mills, Quinn represents one of this year's key electoral districts, a stretch of land that extends from the shores of Lake Erie to the boarded-up mills of South Buffalo and, with twice as many registered Democrats as Republicans, is considered critical if the Democrats are to take back the House in November.

But Clinton's eagerness—some associates describe it as almost an obsession—to see Quinn beaten has less to do with Democratic strategy than personal vengeance. An effortlessly charming moderate Republican, Quinn was one of the few congressional Republicans for whom the president developed a real fondness. The two had worked closely together on the Northern Ireland peace process and the crime bill, and Quinn backed pet presidential projects like AmeriCorps, which most Republicans scorned. After Quinn helped round up crucial GOP votes for a minimum-wage hike, Clinton sent the congressman a personal thank-you note, which Quinn proudly displayed on his office wall. One of a dying breed of Rust Belt Republicans with a visceral concern for the economic insecurities of the working class, Quinn sometimes sounds almost like a Clinton Democrat: "No budget is better than this budget," he declared in voting against his party's 1998 plan. "I support cutting taxes. However, I do not support doing so at the expense of our children's education or by cutting Medicare." At one point, the president even invited the Buffalo Republican to watch the Super Bowl at the White House, where they ate pizza and drank beer.

So it is hardly surprising that during the 1998 impeachment struggle, as the most important vote in Clinton's presidency approached, he turned to Quinn for support. During his campaign for a fourth term, Quinn had told local reporters that Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr's investigation was "way out of control" and that Clinton deserved no more than a censure or rebuke. Ten days before the vote, at the behest of a nervous aide, the president called Quinn from Air Force One just to make sure nothing had changed. According to one congressman familiar with the conversation, Quinn told his friend, "Why are you calling me? You have nothing to worry about."

But five days later Quinn called an unexpected press conference to announce he would vote to impeach. Quinn described his reversal as a moral decision. "I saw the president wasn't being truthful," he explained. But others speculated that he had either cut a deal with GOP leaders for a committee chairmanship or, in the words of New York Representative Peter King—one of the few Republicans who voted against impeachment—that he couldn't "take the pressure [from his party] any more."

The president was furious. After Quinn switched, the last few fence-sitters caved, giving House Republicans a last-

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minute majority. When asked the main reason the president was impeached, a White House aide told the *Daily News*, "Two words: Jack Quinn."

At the State of the Union address a few weeks later, Quinn tried to make up with his longtime friend. He positioned himself on the edge of the aisle where the president would walk in to greet well-wishers on both sides. As Clinton approached, Quinn smiled and extended his hand. Clinton looked at it and then, while onlookers watched from the gallery above, spun around, leaving Quinn's hand hanging, open and empty, in the air.

The very next day, Clinton and Hillary flew to Buffalo, to the heart of Quinn's district, where they held a boisterous anti-impeachment rally—a clear sign that they planned to do more to Quinn than just snub him. Twenty-one thousand people packed Marine Midland Arena. Clinton supporters, considered essential to Quinn's survival in a district in which the president had won reelection with nearly 60 percent of the vote, handed out stickers that read IMPEACH QUINN. Overnight, the little-known congressman became one of the Democrats' fattest targets and one of his party's most vulnerable incumbents. Hillary vowed to campaign for Quinn's opponent, whomever he might be. Union workers, who claimed Quinn had promised to support the president, called him a liar and deluged his office with outraged calls. "We thought he was a friend of ours," John Kaczorowski, president of the local AFL-CIO council, told *The Washington Post*. "We really, really did. Let me tell you something: We won't forget this in two years."

THAT WAS THEN. Last week, when Quinn walked into the Iron Workers Hall in West Seneca, the place was packed with union members and Democratic officials, most of them standing around the edges of the room, where grainy photos of steel- and ironworkers lined the walls. Quinn sat quietly only a few feet from Kaczorowski, while Tom Burke, president of the Carpenters Local No. 9, spoke. "Can I have your attention?" said Burke, as the room fell silent. "I'd like to take this opportunity to introduce Jack Quinn.... Our relationship had started on a rocky note, but, as I watched Jack Quinn work for the last [several] months, he made a true believer out of me. Anyone who says Jack Quinn is not a labor guy has seriously not seen this man work." The room exploded with applause. Kaczorowski, along with scores of Democrats, gave him a standing ovation. Bob McLennan, the local head of the powerful letter-carriers' union and a lifelong Democrat, told me: "Yes, as far as we're concerned, everything has been healed. We still don't like what he did or the way it came about. We think Jack was a little bit deceptive with us on how he was going to cast the vote. But ... since that point he's voted our way, he's supported our issues, and the letter carriers are back with him all the way."

Something remarkable has transpired in this northern corner of New York. In the span of 18 months, Quinn has gone from being almost drummed out of Congress to being almost invincible. Through intense, nonstop retail politicking and championing of labor issues, he has mended a fence once seen as unmendable. A recent poll in *The Buffalo News* showed that, while 55 percent of voters still disagree with Quinn's impeachment vote, 79 percent view him favorably. Ironically, one reason they do is his opposition to the president—on trade. Unlike most Republicans and Clinton Democrats, Quinn opposed the recent vote for permanent normal trading relations (PNTR) for China, which workers in this depressed district fear will suck away jobs to Beijing's cheaper labor market. And last year, over the opposition of GOP leaders and the Clinton administration, the congressman shepherded through the House a bill that would restrict steel imports. Afterward, at a victory rally, steelworkers greeted Quinn with another standing ovation.

Quinn is now so entrenched that, despite the president's personal interest, Democrats initially couldn't find a candidate to challenge him and ultimately ended up backing someone with no political experience. "I think it will be awfully hard for anyone to beat him," says Anthony Masiello, Buffalo's Democratic mayor.

WHEN I MEET Quinn in his district the day after his appearance in West Seneca, he seems far removed from the firestorm that almost consumed him. While his opponent is out stumping frenetically, Quinn will attend two private weddings that day; between ceremonies, he and his wife drop by my hotel. He is taller than I expected, a striking figure with white hair and green eyes whose charm seems more authentic than that of most Washington politicians. He chats gregariously about the city and the old mills and his father, who worked on the railroads for nearly 40 years. But, when I ask him about his vote on impeachment, he grows quiet and his face tightens. "I hate going over this whole thing," he says, "because it really is behind us." He says his vote was a matter of conscience.

"Can you put your hand on a Bible and swear you didn't receive pressure from Tom DeLay?" I ask. He suddenly turns red and starts to rise in his chair. "Yes, I will. Go get a Bible." When he realizes the question is only rhetorical, he softens and sits back down. "Let's ... not talk about that anymore, if you don't mind," he says, his face clearly anguished. "The president and I had a great relationship. That was probably the hardest thing I ever did." He pauses, then adds a short while later: "It's like having a fight with your brother. You don't have to bring it up every year at his birthday. You need to get rid of the damn thing and go on with things."

I ask him if he and the president have made up, and he insists, despite what many of Clinton's allies say, that their relationship has thawed a little. "We've had some discussion on votes in which I can support him," he says. "It's getting better.... [But] is it back to the way it was? No, and never will be, unfortunately."

When the conversation turns back to his election and how he has defied everyone's predictions, he becomes more buoyant. "I don't want to sound overconfident," he says. But "we're off every Democrat's target list. No one is coming after me."

Later that night, at the Erie County Committee dinner, Hillary Clinton is the guest of honor. The first lady is dressed

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all in black and her eyes, clearly exhausted, are made up a touch too heavily. As she works the room, people talk quietly about how she is still struggling to make inroads in this blue-collar Democratic stronghold, where people are suspicious of outsiders and slick politicians.

Polls show the New York Senate race tightening. And, while Quinn may not face a backlash from union voters over impeachment, Hillary may face one over her husband's PNTR crusade. "Jack has solidified his way, and Democrats have become less and less trustworthy to us as a whole," says longtime Democrat McLennan. To my surprise, several people tell me Hillary needs to be more "like Quinn": championing workers and meeting one-on-one with constituents.

Later, after the first lady delivers her speech, Quinn's opponent, John Fee, rushes to the rope line to greet her. As she moves down the line, shaking hands and signing autographs, he reaches out his hand. "John," she says, breaking into a smile. "How are things going?" While others tug at her, the two talk privately for a few moments, then pose for a picture. But then Hillary moves on, offering Fee none of the bold assertions of victory her husband had made a few weeks earlier. Hillary still clearly wants to defeat the man who betrayed her husband. But these days, as one union official puts it, she might be wiser "to get his endorsement." ■

When vice presidents attack.

Golden Mean

By JONATHAN CHAIT

FALL 1999 WAS a miserable time for Vice President Al Gore. Facing an unexpectedly strong primary challenge from Bill Bradley, Gore's listless campaign seemed to exist only to provide fodder for a series of withering assessments by a snickering press. The critiques all hit the same notes: Gore's wonky proposals were small and dull, his sunny autobiographical speeches strained credibility, and his refusal to even mention his opponent by name made him seem aloof and out of touch.

Pundits across the political spectrum urged Gore to get tough, to go negative, to play to his political strengths of ruthlessness and tenacity. When the vice president took their advice (unveiling the since-discarded campaign slogan "Stay and fight"), almost everyone agreed he had finally found his way. "Gore has always been at his best when counterpunching opponents," explained a typical article in *Time* magazine, "... and now he has happily settled into the rhythms of a middleweight club fighter."

But, just a few months after vanquishing Bradley, Gore is back in his customary role as pundit fodder. As certain as the press was then that Gore needed to stay perpetually on the attack, it is now equally certain that the opposite is true. Commentators are united in the belief that his attack-a-day strategy against Texas Governor George W. Bush failed miserably. Dynamic words like "counterpunching" have disappeared from media accounts of Gore's speeches, replaced with adjectives such as "flailing" and "carping."

You'd think Gore would have learned by now to ignore such maddeningly contradictory advice. Instead, he has publicly confessed his "mistake" and dutifully reoriented his campaign along the lines the press demands: issuing wonky proposals, broadcasting sunny autobiographical ads, and declining to utter the name of his opponent.

It's hard to tell whether Gore truly believes the media's critique or whether he is simply prostrating himself before the new consensus in the hope that the gods of conventional wisdom will smile upon him once more. Regardless, his campaign's decision to abandon negativity is a concession to the media's laziness and deep intellectual confusion. Sure, the press dislikes (or claims to dislike) negative campaigning and often conceals this moral judgment in the cool language of pragmatic political analysis. But in truth there is little reason to believe Gore's negative campaigning has failed, much reason to believe it could still work, and even more reason to believe it would be good for American democracy.

The only evidence that Gore's attacks on Bush have failed is that the vice president has fallen a few points in the polls since the end of the primaries. (In many polls, Bush's lead barely exceeds the margin of error.) But this could be the result of any number of factors: Bush is no longer being contrasted with vigorous Arizona Senator John McCain, Gore is no longer being contrasted with the flaccid Bradley, people are paying less attention to politics, and so forth. It is almost impossible to determine which of these developments has caused Gore's slump. But, since political reporters are mainly in the business of assessing campaign tactics, they have a professional bias toward viewing tactics as the explanation for any change in the polls. Hence Gore's decision to attack Bush is to blame for his troubles. As this thesis circulated through the newsmagazines and talk shows, it took on an air of scientific precision.

In fact, the strategic rationale for Gore's going negative remains as strong as it was during the primary season. For one thing, a negative campaign allows Gore to mask his natural weaknesses. Given his mediocre mass-communication skills, it's unlikely the vice president will win the affection of a large majority of voters; but he might

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well persuade them to distrust Bush, about whom they still know little.

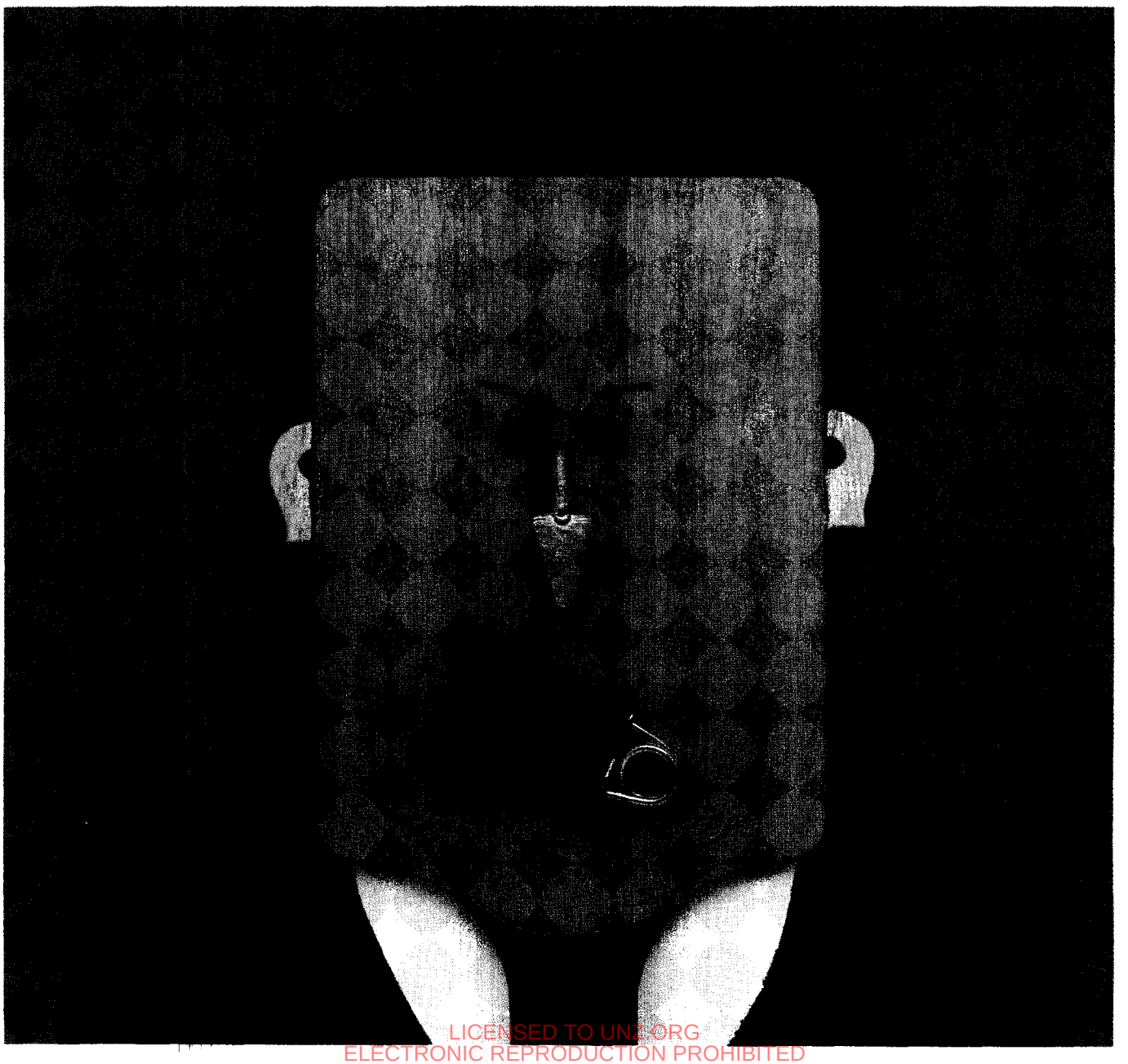
A negative campaign also addresses the structural disadvantage of running as a sitting vice president: it's hard to propose significant policy shifts. A positive campaign requires a steady stream of innovative new proposals. But vice presidents have a difficult time selling these; inevitably, they are asked why their bright idea wasn't proposed by their own president, and they rarely have a good answer. And new ideas usually require more spending, which undercuts Gore's basic promise to maintain fiscal discipline.

Moreover, the main questions of the 2000 election are, from Gore's perspective, negative ones. After eight years of holding the White House, the Democrats do not have a lot of big new ideas they could plausibly enact. Gore's "new" proposals—for instance, individual savings accounts—are mainly souped-up versions of old Clinton programs that went nowhere. Bush, on the other hand, does propose radical policy shifts—focusing on cutting taxes substantially and privatizing Social Security. Gore will be hard-pressed to argue that his proposals will dramatically improve the country, but he can make a strong case that Bush's would make things much worse. And so, since Bush's ideas have greater consequences than Gore's, his platform is the proper ground for debate.

The one important downside to negative campaigning is the widespread prejudice against it, which can redound against its practitioners. Negative campaigning ranks with soft money and partisan gridlock as the kind of thing good-government types allow themselves to detest. Negativity is frequently held up as the cause of such evils as voter apathy and the decline of public discourse.

But these charges are both wrong. Negative campaigns can suppress voter turnout, but they can increase it, too—witness the surge of voter interest in the Bush-McCain primary slugfest, particularly in South Carolina and Michigan, where it was most vicious. And negative campaigning is at least as honest as positive campaigning. Gore's assaults on Bush may lack the dispassion and nuance of a Brookings Institution seminar, but they get the relevant points across pretty clearly. The vice president's biographical speeches from last summer, on the other hand, present a version of his life history far more slanted than anything he has said about Bush.

The emptiness of the "nice" campaign is embodied in the Democratic National Committee's most recent TV



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advertisement. It features a montage of images of the Gore family overlaid with insipid bromides about fatherhood. The only reference to issues is a single sentence—"The Gore plan: promote responsible fatherhood"—that gives not the slightest hint as to what "the Gore plan" actually is.

So, if negative campaigning is often more substantive than positive campaigning, why do journalists treat it with such scorn? The answer is that campaign reporting is structurally biased against substance. Campaign journalists are generally not policy wonks. Since they have neither the training, the inclination, nor (writing on tight deadlines) the time to judge the substance of the candidates' claims, they focus instead on style. A typical dispatch from the hustings will tell you next to nothing about whether Gore's attack on one of Bush's plans is true or false. All that will come across is that Gore sounds "negative."

The fixation on style leads to an ingrained suspicion that policy-based criticisms are specious. This assumption, often unstated, bubbled to the surface in a recent piece by *Newsweek*'s Howard Fineman. "Gore knows that Bush isn't really out to 'destroy' Social Security," Fineman wrote last week, "but he has no compunction about saying so, loudly and often." Actually, Gore's description of Bush's plan is the same critique—albeit in a highly unsubtle form—as that made by most moderate and liberal economists. There's no reason for Fineman to think Gore, a moderate liberal himself, doesn't believe this, let alone for him to assert unequivocally that Gore "knows" otherwise (that is, unless the vice president has secretly confessed his duplicity to *Newsweek*).

In refusing to analyze the merits of Gore's policy critique and treating it instead as evidence of a character flaw, Fineman's article is typical. Reporters, by and large, do not feel qualified to judge competing claims about policy, a task that frequently requires them to listen to lengthy, obtuse briefings from the likes of Alan Blinder or Paul Wolfowitz. But they do feel qualified to judge politicians' personality traits. A candidate's diatribe against his opponent's plans for nuclear missile defense comes across as so much white noise. An accusation that an opponent is a liar, by contrast, is something *real* that reporters can sink their teeth into.

Bush's campaign seems to grasp the rules of the negativity game much better than Gore's. Bush has even gone so far as to make civility a central theme of his candidacy. He has expressed his disdain for "trash-mouth politics" and said, "I don't believe America is interested in having a president who gets elected by tearing people down." The GOP has announced that its convention will be free of partisan rancor. At the same time, Bush regularly ridicules Gore for claiming to have "invented the Internet" and describes him as someone who "will say anything to get elected." In the current environment, as the Bushies understand, such comments don't qualify as negative campaigning, because they don't concern policy and are delivered with a light touch. By any reasonable definition, of course, negative campaigning is exactly what the Texas governor is doing. Come to think of it, maybe that's why he's winning. ■

Campaign Journal

Boring Like a Fox

By MICHELLE COTTLE

NEW YORK

AL GORE'S STAFF billed it as the biggest political event since John McCain sallied forth on the Straight Talk Express. On June 13, at the New York Historical Society on Central Park West, the vice president was to launch a new phase of his campaign—the *key* phase, if his advisers were to be believed. After weeks of Republican sniggering and Democratic grumbling about his flagging, flailing, floundering post-primary performance, Gore would finally erase all doubts with a speech spotlighting his role in the nation's extended economic boom. Then it was off to the "heartland" (read: swing) states of Pennsylvania and Ohio to flesh out his vision of how to keep the good times rolling. Some clever staffers had come up with the title of "Prosperity and Progress" tour—or "Progress and Prosperity," depending on whom you asked. No matter. The order of the words wasn't important. What was important, Team Gore kept telling the media, was that this event was going to be big, Big, BIG.

The hype worked: representatives from every major TV network and print outlet converged on the Upper West Side, quadrupling the veep's media entourage. But this turned out not to be such great news for the vice president, because, when he strode to the stage at around one o'clock that afternoon, he looked and sounded like, well, Al Gore. His posture was perfect, his dark suit fastidiously pressed, his every hair in its proper place. As former Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin made the case for Gore's sound economic stewardship—noting the vice president's "intense thoughtfulness and seriousness of purpose"—Gore sat ramrod straight, blinking every few minutes and occasionally nodding (slowly and ever so slightly) in agreement. Then the vice president himself took the podium and gave a thoughtful, serious talk that deviated hardly a word from the prepared text. He opened with a nod to Ronald Reagan ("Are you better off today than you were eight years ago?"), carefully out-

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lined how he would ensure that we'll be even better off eight years from now, and then exited the stage as the new Gore theme song blared: "You ain't seen nothing yet."

The press corps could not have agreed more. *That was it?* They'd come expecting rhetorical fireworks, bold policy innovations, and massive, cheering crowds—maybe even a few balloons and some confetti. This was supposed to be Gore at his most dynamic. Instead, they got Rubin lecturing on interest rates, followed by an unremarkable Gore performance delivered before a supportive but relatively small and subdued audience. "This was not one of his best speeches," said a regular on the press bus, who actually looked sorry for the veep.

Nor did things really pick up after the kickoff address. Save for an airport rally that night in Scranton, Pennsylvania, Gore limited major appearances on the first leg of his tour to one per day, usually followed by private interviews with TV networks, editorial boards, or local activists—leaving the bulk of the press corps cooling its heels and growing increasingly grumpy. "This was billed as such a big deal; I expected more events," said one annoyed member of the pack. Another actually longed for the relative thrill of the Clinton-Dole race. The following Monday, *The New York Times* gave the thumbs-down verdict its official imprimatur with a story headlined "GORE'S 'PROSPERITY' TOUR IS OFF TO A ROCKY START."

Asked about the less-than-electric atmosphere, chief Gore flack Chris Lehane spun some line about how the campaign wanted voters to focus on the seriousness of the message: discipline, conscience, decency, boldness. But, in elaborating on these points, the vice president sounds a lot like Ward Cleaver determined to make Wally and the Beav grasp the value of a buck. Sure, he smiles, he gestures, he tosses in a few scripted chuckles, but this new phase of the campaign largely highlights just how boring, formal, and tediously responsible Gore is. And to this Democrats should say: It's about damn time.

FORGET ALL THAT warm and fuzzy connecting-with-people garbage. Al Gore is stiff and dull, and it's past time his campaign stopped denying this reality and began exploiting it. Whatever his personality flaws, Gore is considered a serious, thoughtful adult. Texas Governor George W. Bush, on the other hand, remains vulnerable to charges that he's an intellectual lightweight and a "What, me worry?" dilettante. Gore's people need to latch on to these differences rather than trying to transform the veep into some backslapping, boot-wearing good old boy. Take, for instance, all those polls in which people say they'd rather hang out and drink beer with George W. than with Gore. Fair enough. Tales of Bush's life achievements almost invariably focus on what a people person he is. (Who can forget the heartwarming story, related by David Brooks in *The Weekly Standard*, of Bush complementing an aging Gene Autry on his impressive "spray" after Autry had to make an emergency pit stop on the side of the road?) But W. isn't running for prom king or rush chairman. He wants to be president. It's a serious job, and Gore's serious—yes, boring—public persona need not be a handicap. Boring is Robert Rubin. Boring is Alan Greenspan. Boring is why Americans are richer than they've ever been. If what we're looking for in a president is excitement, charisma, and a winning way with the ladies, let's vote in Tom Cruise.

Too often, however, Gore's handlers try to turn him into something he's not. Naomi Wolf wants him to dress in dirt-colored sport coats and beat his chest like Tarzan. Others want him to share tidbits about his private life. Maybe it's because Gore's friends and family are convinced that the stiff characterization is unfair and thus correctable: "But he's so great and warm and funny in private," they lament. Super. Among his close chums, Gore can claim the title and tiara of Washington's Jolliest Prankster. That doesn't change the fact that, in public, the veep is often incapable of projecting warmth or whimsy—or, on occasion, animation itself.

But that's OK. We've seen what happens when a president feels driven to constantly connect with people. The polls say Americans don't want another Bill Clinton. They want someone serious, upstanding, and dependable.

Gore can be those things without changing who he really is. And every time his staff decides that the real Gore isn't good enough, they open him up to a charge much more devastating than dullness: dishonesty. In the post-Clinton environment, it's the accusation that he lacks a personal and political compass that Gore really needs to worry about. Bush staffers run the risk of looking shallow and childish (exactly what W. wants to avoid) if they harp too much on Gore's boringness, but they can talk nonstop with impunity about how the vice president is a poll-obsessed chameleon. In recent weeks, the Bushies have even started issuing press releases describing Gore Versions 1.0 through 6.0. "Al Gore has had so many makeovers now, he is beginning to look like the Avon lady," mocked Republican National Committee Co-chairman Pat Harrison. And the media, burned by Clinton, is on the lookout for the same thing. "If Gore were an American Indian of yore, his name would be Al Finger-in-the-wind," quipped *Washington Post* columnist Richard Cohen on the opening day of the "Progress and Prosperity" tour. "Gore periodically trundles his persona into the body shop for a complete overhaul," wrote *Post* doyenne Mary McGrory.

The "Progress and Prosperity" tour may be the smartest thing the Gore campaign has done in months, because it understands two basic things about this year's election. First, Gore doesn't need to be Clinton. When the country is doing this well, an incumbent (which Gore essentially is) doesn't need to be loved. He just needs to show that he understands what went right and that he'll do more of the same. Second, Gore will never be Clinton. He will never feel our pain, and he's unlikely ever to generate the high approval ratings his boss has frequently enjoyed. Then again, he is also unlikely to get busted for defiling an intern and lying to the American public about it. Last week, Team Gore finally stopped agonizing about the veep's intrinsic squareness and lack of huggability and started moving the campaign toward what he does best: conducting a somber but responsible discussion of where the country should be going and who's best-equipped to lead it there. Gore, it seems, is finally daring to be dull. Hallelujah. The past eight years have been colorful enough. ■

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Stanley Kauffmann on Films

The "I" of the Beholder

In 1935 PAUL GOODMAN published an article called "The Proustian Camera Eye." He had heard so many people say that *Remembrance of Things Past* "would make a good movie" that he looked into the reasons for this belief. Goodman found four attributes of film that linked it, in readers' minds, with Proust: the free association and flow of film; the camera's ability to trace an idée fixe; film's ability to clarify and to dramatize through juxtaposition; and the similarity between the camera and the "I" of Proust's work, both of them observers, not participants.

These four relationships, known or sensed, have moved various film people to deal with Proust. In 1973 Luchino Visconti, who had a lifelong passion for Proust, collaborated with the premier Italian screenwriter Suso Cecchi D'Amico on a Proust screenplay that was published (in Italian) but never produced. In 1978 Harold Pinter, aided by Joseph Losey and Barbara Bray, wrote a Proust screenplay that was published (in English) but never produced. (A theater version of the Pinter screenplay is planned for next season in London.) In 1983 Peter Brook and two others collaborated on a screenplay called *Swann in Love* that unfortunately was produced. Now comes **Time Regained** (Kino), adapted by Gilles Taurand and Raul Ruiz, directed by Ruiz. With taste and some ingenuity, it exploits three of the four Goodman linkages.

Ruiz, born in 1941, is Chilean, but has lived in France since the fall of Allende. He has been making films since 1960, most of which can be described with that nondescript term "avant-garde." The few that I have seen have at least made clear why Ruiz is highly esteemed in the field. Lately he has turned to somewhat more mainstream work: *Three Lives and Only One Death* (1995) had Marcello Mastroianni in four roles. Last year we were promised Ruiz's 1996 film *Genealogies of a Crime*, with Catherine Deneuve and Michel Piccoli, but it never arrived (despite its top prize at the Berlin Film Festival). It's clear enough from these few facts that Ruiz is a serious artist who comes to Proust with an understanding both of the problems and the Goodman affinities.

Ruiz decided to concentrate on the last volume of the work. Pinter said, in the introduction to his version: "The one thing of which I was certain [at the start] was that it would be wrong to make a film centered on one or two volumes.... If the thing was to be done at all, one would have to try to distil the whole work." Pinter proved his point; Ruiz, alas, proves the same point. When Proust wrote *Time Regained*, he relied on the reader's knowledge of the prior six volumes. But Ruiz's film can't rely on that knowledge: he has to cram in explanations of characters and past events, often with voice-over, as the picture goes along. He is a deft technician, but even deft techniques can become a touch too apparent. Pinter's distillation of the seven volumes, though of course it must omit much, at least tries for Proust's cosmic view. With Ruiz, it's a bit like seeing the last chapter of a serial, with facts supplied for those who missed the first six chapters. He has said that he wanted to confront the first volume, *Swann's Way*, with the last volume, but that confrontation doesn't effectively happen. The screenplay simply derives patches of background from previous sections.

The film begins in 1922. Proust is on what would soon be his deathbed, bearded, dictating to his faithful maid, Celeste. He asks her for a box of photographs and, as he looks through them, we hear the murmur of the subjects' voices. (This is only the first of Ruiz's delicate uses of sound—later on, for another instance, the tinkle of a bell for servants blends into a church bell of the past.) The film then melts into a mélange of reminiscences, rather than flashbacks, a stream of relatively recent events with dashes of boyhood and youth. Numerous characters arrive along the way and are tagged, but none of them comes to whole being. All is gorgeous, the Belle Epoque at its most belle, and the cinematography—by Ricardo Aronovich, who did *Providence*—is tender and responsive, with sepia tones for the remoter past. But, though this film runs almost three hours, it is not a free-standing work: it is a series of mobile three-dimensional illustrations for the novel.

Three of the Goodman qualities are often imaginatively used, but even if they were better used and even if the screenplay didn't feel claustrophobic, the fourth Goodman point would make trouble. One long sequence near the end, the musicale given by the Princess de Guermantes, exemplifies this. Marcel arrives late at the musicale and is asked by the butler to wait for an intermission. He sits in a luxe room by himself and has tea (and memories). Then he joins the numerous guests in a palatial salon and moves among them, chatting with those he knows. The music is resumed in another large room, the guests return to the concert, and the musicale ultimately winds up and out. This sequence runs, I'd guess, about fifteen minutes, an immense amount of film time, yet in dramatic or narrative terms, absolutely nothing happens. Marcel attends a party and talks to some people, that's all. Ruiz certainly knows this and, in his congenitally heterodox way, is trying to guide our expectations of drama or story into a new sort of reward, an immersion in atmosphere, a sensation of time suspended. The musicale sequence attempts to transfer to film the merely observant "I" of the novel, but what is generic in Proust's novel does not function equivalently on screen.

That is the insoluble problem for any Proust adaptation. Marcel is not the protagonist of the novel; he is, as Goodman says, the camera. In literature, Marcel is a unique center for a work. His name is mentioned only twice in the seven volumes—most of the time he is "I"—and he is never given a family name. Roger Shattuck reminds us that Marcel "never adequately beholds himself and cannot really believe in his identity or his role. As a result, it is as if a segment of negative space occupies the center of the action." Fairly obviously, none of this hobbles the novel: on the contrary, this structure appeals subtly to the ache of desperation in our own lives, our avidity to remember, to hold on as we drift past, as we see others more clearly than we usually see ourselves. But "negative space" as the center of a film? It is not a weakness of film art that Proust's novelistic device doesn't function well here: it is an assertion of film's properties and strengths.

Marcel, the observer, is played by Marcello Mazzarella, obviously chosen because Ruiz, reasonably enough, wanted Marcel to look like Proust. (Marcel is never really described in the novel.) Mazzarella is presumably Italian so had to be dubbed in French; his voice is supplied by the well-known director Patrice Chereau. And presumably, too, John Malkovich,

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the Charlus, was dubbed: if so, Ruiz found a voice much like Malkovich's. This American actor may have been used because he has made a specialty of eccentrics. Malkovich supplies the eccentricity, right enough, but, as in *Dangerous Liaisons*, the elegance of the character is quite beyond him—so far beyond that he doesn't even attempt it. Catherine Deneuve, Emmanuelle Beart, Marie-France Pisier, and Chiara Mastroianni are also in the cast. They, like the others, were given only wisps of their characters; all of them try to play what they know about their roles, which is more than what the screenplay provides.

Paul Goodman doesn't say in his article that the links between Proust and film are a seductive snare—chiefly because of that fourth element—but, to judge by the two Proust films that I have seen, a snare is what they have so far proved to be. ■

House Arrest

By Zoë Heller

Sex and Real Estate: Why We Love Houses by Marjorie Garber

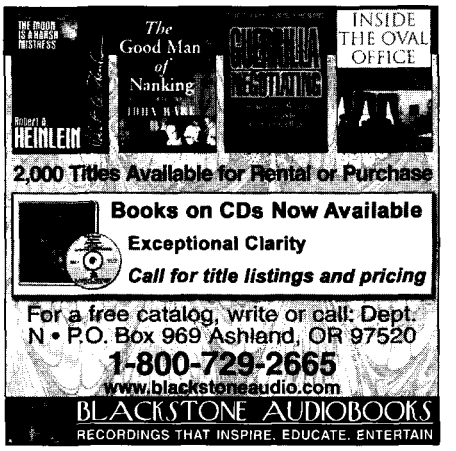
(Pantheon, 243 pp., $23)

Marjorie Garber, William R. Kenan, Jr. Professor of English and the director of the Humanities Center at Harvard University, is a woman of almost sinister prolificity. Every year or so, for many years now, her printer has burped forth some fresh chunk of cultural analysis. There are, one imagines, members of the cultural-studies crowd who set their watches by the regularity of these productions. Early in her career, Garber's work tended to a knotty, theoretical earnestness. Her books had long, fancy-pants titles with semicolons, and fulsome tributes on their acknowledgements pages to the noble institutes that had subsidized them. *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety*, for example, which Garber published in 1992, was a 390-page slab dedicated to the rather platitudinous proposition that the cultural function of transvestism was the subversion of "definitional distinctions" and binary oppositions. It drew heavily—*ça va sans dire*—on the work of Barthes and Derrida and Lacan, and it was full of slightly anguished, grammar-deficient sentences such as the following.

> What this book insists upon, however, is not—or not only—that cultural forces in general create literary effects, nor even—although I believe this to be the case—that the opposite is also true, but rather that *transvestism is a space of possibility structuring and confounding culture*: the disruptive element that intervenes, not just a category crisis of male and female, but the crisis of category itself.

In recent years, Garber's appetite for the rigors of theory seems to have diminished. The books have kept coming, but the italics-heavy meditations and the recherché terminology have receded. In their place, a new, doggedly accessible style has emerged—full of chat and cheer and chummy colloquialism. First there was *Vice Versa* (1995), a study of bisexuality that was widely praised by reviewers for the wealth of "gossip" that it provided about bisexuals through the ages. Next there was *Dog Love* (1996). One rather thought that with this relentlessly cute disquisition on the bond between humans and canines, Garber had descended as far into the realm of perky banality as she was going to descend. But then came *Symptoms of Culture* (1998), a brazenly complacent ramble through some cultural phenomena that tickled Garber's fancy. (Jell-O! Fake orgasms!) And now, just in time to greet the new millennium, Garber has delivered *Sex and Real Estate*, a book so serenely silly—so untroubled by any whiff of a serious idea—as to invite a kind of awe.

Zoë Heller is the author most recently of *Everything You Know* (Knopf).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This latest work, which Garber's publishers are peddling as "an acute analysis of the ways in which we think about the places we hang our hats," proceeds by way of seven essays, on the "cultural role of the house as mother, lover, body or self, fantasy, trophy, history, and escape." Once, Garber would have taken us on a long-winded hunt for the fissures—the *aporia*—of these tropes. But she's been there, done that. Now she is content to serve up a salad of personal and apocryphal anecdote, literary quotation, advertising copy, and anything else that she found in her clippings file—all of it bound together by smirky musings redolent of the "Life's Like That" section in *Reader's Digest*.

"WHEN YOU STOP to think about it," Garber writes in her introduction, "buying and selling a house is a lot like dating." For the next several pages, she will pursue all the ramifications of this lively aperçu—all the funny ways in which real estate transactions can be said to be like the human mating ritual. Real estate is sexy, don't you know. Shelter magazines are sometimes called "decor-porn." Real estate ads are "singles ads. Literally." The vocabulary of real estate is "seductive, flirty, a come-on." Open houses are like mixers. When you want a house you make an offer—or a *proposal*. Geddit? People lie about real estate transactions and, as Jerry Seinfeld "trenchantly" observed, people lie about sex, too. Waiting for a prospective buyer to make an offer is like waiting for your date to call you. Buyers sometimes suffer morning-after remorse! Brokers are like panders! House-buying is like going on a blind date! People fall in love at first sight and house-buyers fall in love at first site! (The latter linguistic felicity is so pleasing to Garber that she is moved to repeat it three times in as many pages.)

It was always one of the most readily appropriated aspects of post-structuralism, this low-grade "mischievousness" with language. Even dim undergraduates who had not made it all the way through *Of Grammatology* could stump up some headline-writer jokes and hope to pass them off as polysemic *jouissance*. Now that subverting metaphysical hierarchies no longer yanks Garber's chain, the wretched propensity for wordplay is all that remains of her former method. "Cabin Fever" is the title she gives to her discussion of the log cabin as an American symbol of humble origins; "Buying Time" is her jubilant description of the American consumer's interest in nostalgia homeware. And so it goes on. The lasting legacy of Barthes and Derrida and all those terrifically sensual French feminists is not, it turns out, the subversion of the humanities as we know them. It is the dodgy pun.

LIKE THE KOSHER product of the cultural-studies mill that it is, *Sex and Real Estate* brims with multidisciplinary references—wacky juxtapositions of high culture and low culture—designed to demonstrate the democratic breadth of the author's interests. Her first essay on "The House as Mother" whisks us through Freud's *unheimlich*; Bachelard's "Poetics of Space"; the paintings of Louise Bourgeois; the novels of Agatha Christie, Virginia Woolf, and E.M. Forster; and any number of studies on the role of the Victorian housewife—all in a mere twenty-three pages. Here's a gal who can move seamlessly from the role of the unicorn in medieval lore to saucy consumer-reportage about the advent of the "integrated refrigerator":

> [Y]ou can stash your Granny Smiths among the lingerie. No need to tiptoe past the kids' rooms at night in search of a quart of Rocky Road. Instead you can keep your sinful tastes under control, and under wraps, by storing your treats in the bedroom.

Despite its strenuous show of range, however, this book's preoccupations are bizarrely narrow. Give or take a few passing references to a homogenous entity called Europe, the focus remains fixed on the meaning of real estate in late-twentieth-century, boom-time America. And even within that restricted ambit, Garber's discussions do not venture much beyond the mores and the preoccupations of her own social subset. There are entire chapters devoted to "The Summer House" and "The Trophy House," and endless drear about the cool things you can buy at Restoration Hardware—but there is nothing about postmodernist houses or urban, working-class real estate. There are acres of persiflage about walled gardens, but zip about stoops.

The other thing to note about Garber's barrage of allusions and citations is how little she actually does with any of them. It is as if the effort of accumulating all this undifferentiated cultural "evidence" had tuckered her out, and she were now excused from any obligation to construct an argument. No matter how far one ploughs into this book, one never quite becomes accustomed to the sheer irrelevance of Garber's personal anecdotes, the blithe pointlessness of her free-associative digressions. By far her favorite trick is to plonk down a long exposition of something that she has read, observe smugly how "interesting" or "suggestive" it is, and then move briskly on.

This is maddening—but slightly less maddening, on the whole, than Garber's habit of misappropriating quotations in the leaden pursuit of "fun." During a prolonged riff on "distressed" furniture, she decides—what a madcap!—to interpolate a little Wordsworth.

> "A deep distress hath humanised my Soul," wrote the poet Wordsworth, feelingly. Would it have done the same for his love seat? (His contemporary Cowper did write a famous poem called "The Sofa," but...)

And here she is press-ganging poor Robert Frost into a discussion of the American fashion for twin beds during the 1950s:

> If poet Robert Frost could muse that writing poetry without rhyme was like playing tennis with the net down, what might he have to say about the provocative barrier posed by that yard of empty space, occupied only by night table and lamp, that kept the two beds apart? Could it be that some Americans chose twin beds, not because they held sexuality at a distance but because twin beds were *sexier*?

THIS GRUESOME JAUNTINESS of tone pervades *Sex and Real Estate*. At first, one assumes that it is a calculated affectation—the honey with which Garber hopes to catch the general reader. But it is too sustained for that. Somewhere along the line, the dread possibility that this is Garber's authentic idiolect must be confronted. Nobody could fake the illiteracy of sentences such as "Nor are such moments only a by-product of contemporary malaise or over-the-topness." Nobody could simulate the way Garber murders a joke, or the tedious amazement with which she reiterates a cliché:

> "There's a saying in the real estate business," a New York City broker confided to me. "Buyers are liars."
>
> "*Buyers* are liars?"
>
> "Yes," he said, with a nice mixture of sheepishness and bravado. "Buyers are liars." But what did it mean? What could a buyer possibly lie about? From a home buyer's point of view, it would seem more likely that sellers, or indeed realtors were liars....But why should a *buyer* lie?

There are occasions on which Garber wanders, as it were inadvertently, into an interesting topic. In the course of a disconnected chat about the Historical Commision that oversees her neighborhood in

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Cambridge, for example, she mentions that her application to put up shutters and clapboards on her nineteenth-century house was turned down because these additions, while historically appropriate, would highlight other, inappropriate additions that had been made to the house in the 1960s. "What I wanted to know," Garber writes, "was whether the inappropriate dormers and the inappropriate kitchen windows were now protected by the Cambridge Historical Commission—since they had been on the house when it entered the historical rolls—as another piece of 'history.'"

There is something potentially rather interesting here about the sentimental arbitrariness of the preservation ethos. The moment that an architectural feature comes of age and earns the right to be protected is usually when it is old enough to have featured in the preservationists' misty watercolor memories of his or her own childhood. This is why people live happily with hideous nineteenth-century additions to medieval houses but rail against the twentieth-century owners who want to make useful changes to the plumbing. It is also why middle-aged Americans have recently started lying down in the dirt to save "mid-century" suburban ranch houses from the oncoming bulldozers.

BUT IF GARBER harbors an opinion on any of this, she is unwilling to share it. She rapidly veers off point, to take up an anodyne survey of various contests that have arisen between the "individuality" of house owners and the "authenticity" of their houses. And her insistence on being officially "nonjudgmental" persists even when, as in her discussion of nouveaux riche trophy homes, her snobby opinion is laughably apparent. Here she prissily enumerates all the faux finishes and architectural anomalies favored by the suburban "super-middle class," but carefully leaves it to others to actually disparage these aesthetic choices as vulgar or unethical. "'Starter palaces,'" she writes, "is how one enviromentally concerned couple dismissed these mass-market mansions and the wasteful habits of 'boomers who take up more space and resources than they need.'"

Of course, it may have occurred to Garber that people who summer in charming Nantucket houses, as she does, ought not to throw stones at wasteful bougies. It is significant that the closest *Sex and Real Estate* ever comes to advancing an authorial idea occurs in a passionate defence of George Babbitt's middle-class materialism. This unique appearance of an angle is worth quoting in full.

> It is easy to lampoon poor Babbitt, who is "enchanted with his bathroom fixtures..." And it is easy to critique the materialism of the surface, to decry "commodity fetishism" and "conspicious consumption" as symptoms of status display. But take away the sense of invective here—too easily hurled by both moralists and journalists—and you will be left with a different kind of "reality": things, commodities, objects, consumable goods are not only possessions but a kind of language. They are, like it or not, the way we communicate with each other, with ourselves, and with the world. If Babbitt's sense of virtue seems misplaced, it is not the fault of his water-faucets.

Whoever said it was? Whatever. We get the message: we ought not to moralize about consumer frenzy, or feel guilty about slavering over Pottery Barn catalogues. For when all is said and done, buying things is just a another *symptom of culture*—another groovy way of talking to one another. This, I believe, was the sort of thing that Terry Eagleton was getting at when he criticized the deconstructionist stance as "being mischievously radical in respect of everyone else's opinions... while utterly conservative in every other way."

In making one's way through this bad, sad book, one's mind eventually turns to the innocents who pay cash money to have their precious offspring attend Harvard University and receive instruction from Professor Garber—the loving parents, who even now are scrambling to get the fees together for little Lucinda's autumn installment of Garber-think. Those dupes should read this book immediately—drink deep from the fountain of Garber's wit—and wise up. Then they can take their tuition money and spend it on a new kitchen or a leather sofa or some other spiffy thing from the lovely language of commodities. ■

We Cannot Be Fooled, We Can Be Fooled

By C.K. WILLIAMS

Open Closed Open
by Yehuda Amichai
translated by Chana Bloch and Chana Kronfeld

(Harcourt Brace, 184 pp., $25)

WHEN WE WERE being mistaught poetry in grammar school and high school, the most alienating misapprehension that our teachers inflicted on us was probably the notion that poetry had something to do with wisdom; that it not only embodied wisdom, but more than anything else it *was* wisdom. We were given to understand that poetry was a dazzling compilation of sage instruction and profound advice. It is boring just to remember how boring were those compilations of jingly-jangly maxims and supposedly inspired adages that had been extracted for us and that we were meant somehow to apply—a possibility that we knew was absurd. No wonder that we ducked; and that most of us stayed ducked.

Strangely, I think that when non-readers of poems explain their disaffection from the art by bemoaning the lack of rhyme and meter in contemporary poetry, it is often an expression of a nostalgia for this kind of quasi-philosophical counsel, although in truth there is precious little of it in real poetry. If there is anything morally useful in poems, it is to be found, I think, in their spiritual and emotional drama, just as what is most useful in our own lives is inextricably embedded in our experience and tends to disintegrate when we abstract it and attempt to make it relevant.

And yet there is in poetry, or in great poetry, poetry such as Yehuda Amichai's *Open Closed Open*, a certain intensity of attention, an ethical focus so absolute that there is no question that a signifi-

C. K. WILLIAMS's *Repair* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux) was recently awarded the Pulitzer Prize in poetry. A memoir, *Misgivings*, will be published by Farrar, Straus & Giroux this spring.

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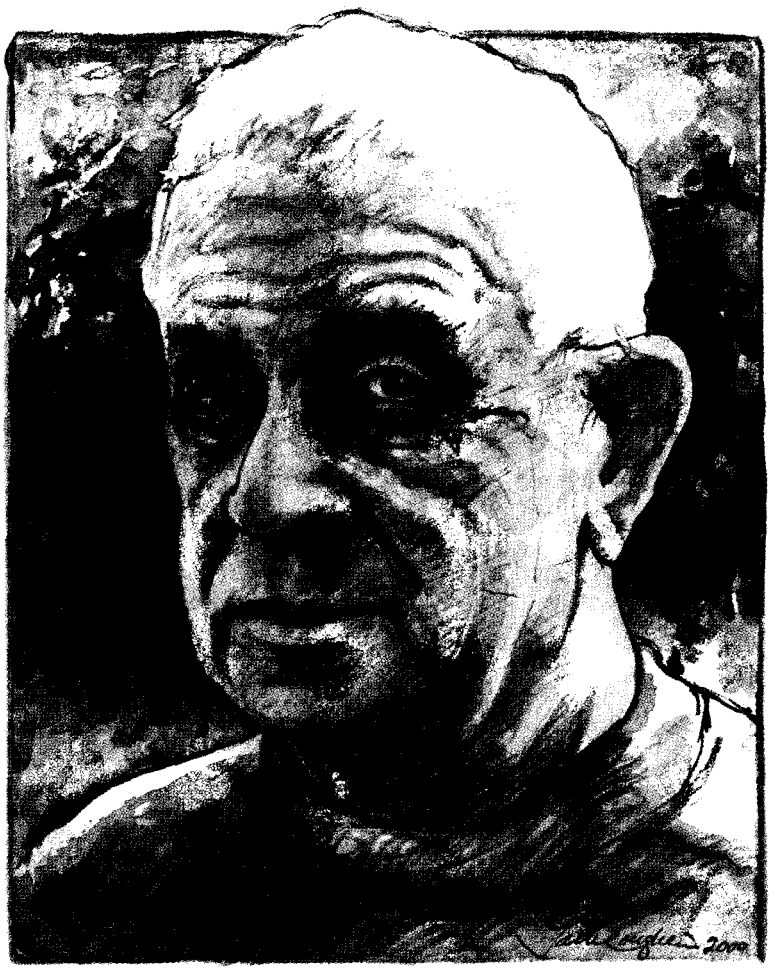
cant knowledge is crucially entailed, and wisdom, as a category or a value, seems inescapably germane, no matter how our aesthetic understanding might make us veer away from it. And we do veer: even when Amichai, the shrewdest and most solid of poetic intelligences, finds himself formulating what sound like elements of some ultimate comprehension, he seems to doubt what he is doing, and he backs away, and undercuts, and undermines, sometimes with irony, sometimes with humor, sometimes only for moments, with something like self-scorn.

For one does not have to accede to the illusion that poetry is essentially didactic to recognize that there is a tradition, of which Amichai is quite clearly aware, of poetry as a summing-up, of long or longish poems that intend to recapitulate the realizations at which a rigorous intelligence and a forceful poetic will can arrive. It is a tradition that exists apart from but adjacent to epic and tragedy; it probably begins in the West with Lucretius; and it comes to us through Dante, Milton, Pope, and Goethe, among not all that many others. In our century, the two most admired examples of this tradition are Rilke's *Duino Elegies* and Eliot's *Four Quartets*. Amichai seems to have had both those poems in mind in writing this book: he infuses some of Rilke's metaphoric detail into his own and refers directly several times to Eliot, even going so far as to quote from him several times most obviously in a page that elaborates on "what was and what might have been."

Certainly Rilke's and Eliot's poems incorporate ranges of experience that make them worthy of being described as "wise," though as a means of articulating the sort of sanctified sagacity that my teachers fancied they certainly disappoint. Rilke's poem, undeniably one of the masterworks of twentieth-century literature, was taken by some of his more rapt enthusiasts as the basis for a spiritual cult; but if the work is supposed to point toward systems of belief and action, they are even more elusive and inconclusive than what we find in our more sanctioned canonical writings. To be sure, there are readers who take any text short of the sports section as though it were meant to bring about "illumination"—Wittgenstein can, alas, be read like Kahlil Gibran—but even for Rilke's most devoted countesses it was hard to find much heartening ground for faith in the *Elegies*. The poem concludes in a rapture glorifying "lament," and what that might indicate as a spiritual directive is impossible to say. The *Four Quartets* have evoked a similarly hopeful reverence in some of its readers, not least because Eliot set out quite consciously to echo liturgy; the poem employs various prayer-like devices of repetition, rhythm, and phrasing. Both works are, in some strict sense, inspired, and treat aspects of experience that are rarely elucidated in any way. And yet even these vatic masterpieces are not of much use, if it is a coherent metaphysical or ethical doctrine for which one is searching.



Yehuda Amichai by Jack Coughlin for The New Republic

Amichai's new book of poems similarly comprises a sustained outburst of inspiration, and it has a similarly complicated relation to wisdom and to matters of the spirit. There are differences, of course. Amichai's work is longer, and it incorporates a personality distinctly different from Eliot's and Rilke's. Amichai is a Jew, and an Israeli, and he is exquisitely aware of the conditions entailed by those identities, both historical and spiritual. He is on a much more familiar and easier footing with the traditional term "God," and his unexpected, almost casual intimacy with divinity seems much closer to traditional piety than anything found in either of the other poets. Amichai surely meant his poem—again, in a deep sense *Open Closed Open* is one long poem in many parts—to consider the same grand and fundamental issues of life and death, but his yield of meanings, his "wisdom," is unmistakably his own.

Amichai is a poet of powerful feeling, of nearly boundless appetites and affections. He is attached, with a commitment that sometimes drives him to distraction, to the things of the world, to the natural and the human, to the other and the self, to the divisions of his own body; but his poetry is informed by a skepticism, a rage for objectivity, that is just as vigorous. Several times near the beginning of his book he uses the image of two heavy grindstones—"the spirit is ground up as by two heavy grindstones,/upper and lower"—and there is no doubt that the genesis of the image is to be found in the seemingly irreconcilable aspects of his imaginative and moral struggles. He adores the world, in detail and in large, as much as any poet who has ever lived, but a part of his mind is taken with a wild doubt that drives it relentlessly toward lucidity.

Amichai despises all the disfiguring and degrading illusions that are attached to so much of human life, public and private, present and past; but he also allows no room in his poetry for avoidance, for omission, for a prematurely resolving subjectivity. His own over-full consciousness is his subject and his object; and he vividly demonstrates, and tries to rectify, the way that even our best-intentioned drive for understanding is susceptible to sentiment and to wistful self-delusion, and to our reflex to make the world fit our seemingly admirable preconceptions and longings.

At the same time, there is in the poems the sense of a synthesis, and of an

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acceptance—an acceptance that triumphs not in the negation of doubt, but in the incorporation of doubt into an ardently comprehensive awareness. Amichai has lived, and has distilled in his writing, a life of really singular richness. His own adult life has been almost precisely coeval with the history of his country. He has led as energetic and as rewarded a literary career as any of his contemporaries anywhere. He has fought the wars of his nation, and the battles of love and marriage and parenthood, and the struggles of self-overcoming that the life of a conscious artist demand. Now, he means to be saying to himself, now that you have seen and felt everything, and caused yourself to feel everything in poetic reflection again, felt it backwards and forwards, in elation and despair—now what have you come to? And his answer is: a negation for every assertion, to guard against falsehood; a speculation for every supposition, to guard against self-deception; and an unaccomplished act remembered for every seemingly admirable but possibly misconceived accomplishment.

AMICHAI'S METHODS FOR working through all of this are various: paradox, irony, reversal, commentary, contradiction. He can bring himself to say, "We cannot be fooled. Yes we can be fooled," and then, just a few pages later, "We can be fooled. No, we cannot be fooled." He proposes alternative narratives for personal experience, for history, for myth. With biblical myth, the results can be fanciful, and enchanting. One section of the book is a re-telling of biblical stories in forms not unlike some of the zanier passages of *The Waste Land*.

> King Saul never learned how to play
> or to sing
> nor was he taught how to be king.
> Oh he's got the blues,
> he's nothing to lose
> but the moody tune
> on his gramophone
> and David is its name-oh,
> David is its name,
> its name its name its name....
>
> Our father Jacob, on the beaten track,
> carries a ladder on his back
>
> like a window washer to the VIPs.
> He does God's windows, if you please.

(Not knowing Hebrew I cannot vouch in the strictest way for Chana Bloch's and Chana Kronfeld's translations; but this volume is so satisfying in English, the language is so lively and the cadences are so tight, that it is hard not to trust them. They recently published an illuminating article in *The American Poetry Review* on translating the book, in which they described their diligence in taking into account what they call "Amichai's affinity for word-play as serious business.")

In "Jewish Travel: Change Is God and Death Is His Prophet...," Amichai marvelously recasts biblical history by having Moses write the Torah "as a travel book,"

> a memoir, every chapter with
> something very personal
> that was his alone—like Pharaoh's
> daughter, like his sister Miriam,
> his brother Aaron, his black wife,
> the Ten Commandments.

Then, in one of the most endearing passages in the book, he returns to the story of Abraham and Isaac:

> Every year our father Abraham would
> take his sons to Mount Moriah
> the way I take my children to the Negev
> hills where I once had a war.
> Abraham hiked around with his sons.
> "This is where I left
> the servants behind, that's where I tied
> the donkey to a tree
> at the foot of the mountain, and here,
> right here, Isaac my son, you asked:
> Behold the fire and the wood, but where
> is the lamb for a burnt offering?
> Then, up a little further, you asked for
> the second time."

And he goes on, so intimately, so lovingly:

> After Abraham died, Isaac started taking
> his sons to the same place.
> "Here I lifted the wood, this is where I
> got out of breath...."

And ends:

> And when Isaac's eyes were dim with age,
> his children
> led him to that same spot on Mount
> Moriah, and recounted for him
> all that had come to pass, all that he
> might have forgotten.

There are also moments in which the past and the present, the mythic and the personal, fuse even more clearly and intensely. About intimacy and love, Amichai is always more gentle and more forbearing than about anything else; and about love he evokes emotions grounded in the pure origins of affection.

> Every woman in love is like our mother
> Sarah,
> lying in wait behind the door while the
> men inside
> discuss the beauty of her body and her
> future.
> She laughs into her palm, her hollow
> palm, as into a womb,
> ocarina of a future, like the light cough
> of a clever fox....
> And every loving woman is like Rebecca
> at the well, saying
> "Drink, and thy camels also." But in
> our day Rebecca says:
> "The towels are on the top shelf in the
> white closet
> across from the front door."

YET AMICHAI'S PURPOSES are not always so uncomplicated. He means to confront, to demand, to analyze everything. Nothing may be allowed to escape his exigent, mordant scrutiny: not history, not belief, not his nation, not his self. He questions gender foolishness, as when he challenges the casuistical puritanism of the ultra-Orthodox by expressing what sounds like an innocent desire to be prepared for burial by women, for the ultras a sin. And he juxtaposes the intimate and the horrendous in combinations that can be chilling, as when he evokes the Angel of Death during the exodus from Egypt

> standing over them, legs wide apart...
> crotch gaping male and female
> like a bloody sun in the thick of frizzled
> black death.

Even God, or especially God: Amichai's is a God composed of absence, of negation, of accusation; a God of excruciating nearness and agonizing inscrutability; of power and of impotence. Sometimes the closeness, the approachability, of God brings forth a tone of fondness, even of conviviality.

> The Jewish people read Torah aloud
> to God
> all year long, a portion a week,
> like Scheherazade who told stories to
> save her life.
> By the time Simchat Torah rolls around,
> God forgets and they can begin again.

Or:

> The God of the Christians is a Jew,
> a bit of a whiner,
> and the God of the Muslims is an Arab
> Jew from the desert, a bit hoarse.
> Only the God of the Jews isn't Jewish.

More often, though, the relationship between Amichai and his God is harsh, painful, a matter for dark and fearsome questioning. "I declare with perfect faith," he writes (in an old liturgical phrase that becomes a refrain in the poem),

> that prayer preceded God.

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Prayer created God,
God created human beings,
human beings created prayers
that create the God that creates
human beings.

And, finally, because he is a Jew, and because he is "not one of the six million," he adduces (again with the aid of a phrase from the prayer book) also the God who is both intimate and maddeningly lax.

"Our Father, Our King." What does a
father do
when his children are orphans and he
is still alive? What will a father do
when his children have died and he
becomes
a bereaved father for all eternity?

And history has any people ever lived so many vagaries of history, in their very flesh, as the Israelis? And has any Israeli lived them more intensely than Amichai? First as a Jew:

After Auschwitz no theology:
From the chimneys of the Vatican,
white smoke rises—
a sign the cardinals have chosen
themselves a pope.
From the crematoria of Auschwitz,
black smoke rises—
a sign the conclave of Gods has not yet
chosen
the Chosen people.

Then as a citizen, a soldier—for surely no nation more than Israel has been so caught between history's many narratives, and has so often gone forth in fierce obedience for the great cause of national and religious survival and then been brought up by so many stoppings to think, so many changes of mind:

When I was young I believed with all
my heart
the Huleh swamp had to be drained.
Then all the bright-colored birds fled
for their lives.
Now half a century later they are filling it
with water again
because it was all a mistake. Perhaps my
entire life
I've been living a mistake.

This is Amichai's personal experience of what amounted to the national recantation of one of the founding symbols of Israeli statehood, the draining of the swamps near Galilee, which had been nearly as much an article of Zionist pride as the Jewishly blooming deserts. A later generation realized that the reclaiming of the swamplands was an ecological disaster, so they were flooded again. And even recent history must be written again, and the relationship to enemies and to friends reconsidered.

Amichai broods on the propensity for communal legends to deceive; but this is not the customary literature of disillusion. He is too much of a realist, he is too experienced in the perversities of history, to be surprised or outraged by the crude discrepancies between political rhetoric and political outcomes. Still, he comes close to disdain when he refers to modes of public remembering, at one point scrutinizing one of the memorials to the War of Independence, a scattered column of burnt-out tanks and armored vehicles along a highway, by adding to them his own momentos about the vagaries of death and destiny:

The skeleton of some other car,
charred in a traffic accident
on some other road....

And in another context:

Tova's brother, whom I carried wounded
from the battle at Tel Gath,
recovered and was forgotten because
he recovered, and died
in a car crash a few years later, and
was forgotten
because he died.

And Amichai knows, too, the resigned and sad stoicism of the Israeli, living as the conditional in the psychoses of other nations, as a parent who, in an armed and hating world, must send his children off to military service. In a wrenching simile, he regards his son's face in the window of the bus taking him away to his army base, "like a stamp on an envelope." Later he must behold his daughter's face as her bus takes her away, and he find nothing but the same terrifyingly impersonal figure to employ. Then, the crying out:

Oh, those stamps, those letters sent off
into the world,
those letters we send. Those names,
addresses, numbers,
those colorful stamps, those faces ....

There are so many stunning metaphors in these pages. Amichai has always had a dexterous and supple metaphorical imagination; and now the force of his feeling, the necessity that he has imposed upon himself to come to conclusions, takes him to astonishing lengths. Every perception, experience, reflection, emotion, and tradition presents itself as the potential half of a simile. Sometimes his metaphorical passion seems nearly to rend itself to pieces in trying to do so much labor of transfiguration. In a passage in which he surely has himself in mind, he writes:

The singer of the Song of Songs sought
his beloved so long and hard
that he lost his mind and went looking
for her with a simile map
and fell in love with the images he
himself had imagined.

Everywhere there are figures of wrenching poignancy. In the section called "Evening Promenade on Valley of the Ghouls Street" (which echoes the "They all go into the dark" passage in the "East Coker" section of Eliot's *Quartets*), he writes,

A few remain standing at the crossroads
of empty streets
like windsocks at the airport. But each
one
is blown a different way, each in the
direction of his flight
by his own wind, his own spirit.

And again, in another passage, about visiting the cemetery of the village in Germany where he was born:

There's the name of my mother's
mothers, and a name from the last
century. And here's a name,
and there! And as I was about to brush
the moss from a name—
Look! an open hand engraved on the
tombstone, the grave of a *kohen*,
his fingers splayed in a spasm of holiness
and blessing,
and here's a grave concealed by a thicket
of berries
that has to be brushed aside like a shock
of hair
from the face of a beloved woman.

Sometimes Amichai's figurative work can be as charming and as playful as his work with the Bible. In "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, why Jerusalem?" he exalts for his beloved city, and frets about the way the world obsesses about it, and laments "Why, of all places, Jerusalem?" He proposes other possibilities—Babylon, Petersburg, Rome, and finally (of all places) Vancouver:

why not Vancouver with her salmon
that ascend to her from the sea, crawling
on their bellies up the hard mountain
slope
like atoning pilgrims, kosher pilgrims
of fin and scale ....

There is so much sheer imaginative force in this book. In a single sequence, about a visit to a museum, Amichai generates enough similes for whole volumes of

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lesser poets.

A collection of ritual objects . . . :
spice boxes
with little flags on top like festive troops
and many fragrant generations of
sacrifice,
and the memory of many Sabbath nights
that did not end in death.
And happy menorahs and weepy
menorahs and oil lamps
with the pouting beaks of chicks like
children singing,
their mouths wide open in desire and
love...
Seder plates that rotate at the speed
of time
so it seems they are standing still,
and kiddush cups
in a row on the shelf like soccer trophies.
. . . A collection of ritual objects
like the gaudy toys of a baby god, the gift
of an aged nation, like the strange
instruments
of a ghost orchestra, like some odd
motionless
bottom fish deep in the waters of time.

Perhaps, at this level of transformative power, when consciousness manifests so astonishingly its ability to elevate the particular to the conceptual grandeur of the general, it is only metaphor itself, and the mind as the master metaphor, that can mediate between the irresolvables of self and other, trust and mistrust, reflection and action. And it may be that finally the most decisive element of poetic worth might have to do with the sheer quantity of this transfiguring metaphorical energy. That, and a certain sensual and intellectual assurance that one is capable of dealing with the manifold complexities of existence, and that imagination is capacious enough to contain and to recast all those complexities, without aversion or exclusion. By these measurements, no poet alive has more claim to stature than Amichai.

IF THERE REALLY is such a thing as wisdom, it might well reside in the character that a master such as Amichai can fashion for himself, and so for us. Our connection to anything ultimate, in other words, is more aesthetic than moral; and to understand this is to understand also that this connection is never, in any way, dogmatic. To sojourn with Amichai in the vast, rugged, sympathetic domain of his imagination is to be given leave to linger in one of those privileged moments when we are in a confidential and confident engagement with our own spirits, when we know with certainty that such a process of imaginative self-investigation is proper and just, regardless of the substance or the occasion of our thoughts.

The wisdom of Amichai's poetry consists of an essential mistrust of any prescriptive thought or act, from any source, from any community or nation, from any constricted notion of self. There is much we cannot know about ourselves, and about the universe, but at the same time this condition must not prevent us from keeping all that disorderly material as a vital part of our consciousness, for it is what enriches and gives resonance to our self-conception. It is a limitation that launches us. Whether the admirable equilibrium that Amichai achieves in *Open Closed Open* is accessible to us is our own affair; but we have to be grateful at how much he has bestowed of his own harrowing experiment of self-realization, and thankful, too, that the outcomes at which he arrives at for himself are, in the end, so benign and so exalting.

All my life I played chess with myself
and with others
and the days of my life were chess pieces,
good and bad—I and me,
I and he, war and love, hope and
despair,
black pieces and white. Now they're all
jumbled together,
colorless, and the chessboard has no
squares,
it's a smooth surface blending into night
and into day.
The game is calm and has no end,
no winners,
no losers, the hollow rules
clang in the wind. I listen. And I am
quiet.
In my life and in my death. ■

Tango and the Individual Talent

By JEREMY EICHLER

Le Grand Tango: The Life and Music of Astor Piazzolla by María Susana Azzi and Simon Collier

(Oxford University Press, 384 pp., $30)

I.

IT WAS A typical night in Buenos Aires in the early 1940s, when the city was at its most resplendent and the tango was in its golden age. A band led by the legendary Anibal Troilo took the stage for a Carnival dance at the Boca Juniors soccer club. Among its players was the precocious young Astor Piazzolla, who had recently joined the group on the bandoneon—the accordion-like squeezebox that is the signature instrument of the tango. When the group unveiled Piazzolla's arrangement of the classic "Inspiración," something peculiar happened. The dancers stopped dancing. Some walked out, but others approached the stage to listen to the music more carefully.

It was an augur of things to come, in the young bandoneonist's creation of something more complex than simple dance music, and in the deeply divided reaction that he would draw from the audience. Without knowing it at the time, Piazzolla had begun what he would later describe as a "great tango revolution," a quest to liberate the music from the strictures of the past. It would consume him for the remaining fifty years of his life. Over the course of those decades, Piazzolla infused the tango with baroque (and Baroque) counterpoint, classical polyphony, Stravinskian textures, and jazz-inspired harmonies. He wrested it from the dance hall and turned it into serious music, or what he called *nuevo tango*.

It was one of the century's most ingenious reimaginings of a popular musical tradition, often compared to Gershwin's transformations of jazz. Without losing the essence of his inherited materials, Piazzolla distilled the tango's yearning, and sublimated its aggression, and preserved its anguished eroticism, and forged a highly accessible art music with cosmopolitan appeal. It is by turns ecstatically lyrical and harshly dissonant, and

JEREMY EICHLER writes about music for *Newsday*.

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always tinged with a wistful awareness of quotidian sorrow. This lingering sadness is no doubt connected to Piazzolla's own sense of displacement. He was, to borrow Mahler's description of himself, "thrice homeless"—an Argentinean who grew up in America, a tango musician in the worlds of classical music and jazz, an unwelcome avant-gardist in the world of traditional tango.

While his music won an enthusiastic following in Europe, the United States, Brazil, and Mexico, Piazzolla was not widely appreciated in his native Argentina until a decade before he died in 1992. Instead, his tampering with a native form as sacrosanct as the tango earned an intensity of contempt from the music's old guard that may be difficult to fathom in this country, where disagreements over style and genre exercise only a handful of artists and critics. In Argentina in the late 1950s and '60s, the heyday of Piazzolla's tango wars, the musicians in his band received death threats. Physical altercations, sometimes between "piazzollistas" and "anti-piazzollistas," sometimes involving the band itself, occurred often. (Once Piazzolla's ensemble was reportedly doused with gasoline and almost set on fire.) As the composer would complain, "In Argentina you could change hundreds of presidents, you could change religions, but you can't change the tango."

Ultimately Piazzolla triumphed over his detractors—a victory that can be attributed to the force of his personality as much as to the power of his music. By the end of his life, his quintet was in great demand on three continents, he had more commissions for new works than he could keep up with, and, perhaps most tellingly, he was deeply respected by a wide array of musicians, from Mstislav Rostropovich to Gerry Mulligan. Since his death, Piazzolla's musical reputation has soared even higher, into a voguish adulation, with Yo-Yo Ma, Gidon Kremer, Daniel Barenboim, Emmanuel Ax, Al Di Meola, and many others recording his works.

And now comes a new biography, by the Argentinean anthropologist María Susana Azzi and the historian of Hispanic cultures Simon Collier. While critical writings and anecdotal memoirs by fellow musicians and family members have been published in Spanish, this is the first full-length life of the composer in English. It is a welcome book that helps to right the great imbalance between the popularity of Piazzolla's music and the dearth of reliable writing on his life. In particular, this biography is laudable for its detailed chronicle of Piazzolla's performance career, from his early days with Troilo to his final years of celebrity with his second quintet. The authors strew their account with contemporary reviews and commentary from the press, as well as extensive material from 200 interviews. These interviews sometimes give the book a frustratingly chatty tone, but they also establish Piazzolla's limitless devotion to his art.

Astor Piazzolla by David Schorr for The New Republic

Unfortunately, Azzi and Collier do not go quite far enough in probing the complexities in Piazzolla's character or, more specifically, the myth of the revolutionary that he created around himself. Piazzolla was obsessed with his place in musical history and in a larger narrative of the decline and rebirth of the tango. He was given to grandiose statements, often speaking of himself in the third person, in which he would declare his intention (as he once put it) to "provoke a national scandal, to break with all the musical schemes prevailing in Argentina." It was not a merely impetuous remark. Piazzolla consistently cast himself as the redeemer of what he believed was an ossified musical form.

Publicly, he spoke confidently of revolution; privately, he was always less certain of the costs. Despite his radical innovations, Piazzolla was never content with the glamorous fringe to which the avant-garde is often consigned. Moreover, his explosive anti-traditionalist rhetoric masked a deeply conservative streak in his music, as well as a need for domestic acceptance that he could deny but never escape. He wished to transcend the banality of the tango, but not its popularity. He wanted to be true, but also to be loved. Azzi and Collier provide ample evidence of these fundamental tensions, but they do not fully address them. Their section entitled "Piazzolla and the Tango Tradition"—the heart of the matter—is two pages long.

Azzi and Collier are scholars deeply versed in the broader history of the tango, but they choose not to include that history in their book. This is deeply regrettable, since it is only by considering the tango's roots that one can understand the subversive nature of Piazzolla's enterprise, as well as, paradoxically, the ways in which it was deeply consonant with certain strains of the tradition to which he fell heir. For Piazzolla intruded upon a musical drama that had begun more than a half-century before his arrival. To understand the nature of that drama and Piazzolla's role in it, one must first turn to its beginning.

II.

THERE IS NO consensus on the etymology of the word "tango," but scholars agree that the music and the dance emerged in Argentina late in the nineteenth century, at a time when the country was receiving thousands of European immigrants, many of them Italian. The new arrivals naturally congregated in the port cities of Buenos Aires

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and Montevideo, where they drifted toward the slums of the outer neighborhoods. There they mixed with the sundry characters of the Argentinean underclass, including the famed *compadritos*—pimps and stylized petty criminals—who quickly found their way into knife fights and local myths.

Those peripheral neighborhoods were known as *arrabales*, and they were the backdrop for the fusion of several musical and dance forms. The duple-metered Cuban *habanera* and its European descendent, the *tango andaluz* (brought by Spanish dance troupes and not related to the tango), collided with the Gaucho traditions from Argentina's rural interior, such as the improvised folk poetry of the *payada*, often sung to a simple guitar accompaniment, and the syncopated and suggestive *milonga*, which began as a song, but soon evolved into a popular dance of the *arrabal*. The *milonga* then encountered the African-Argentinean *candombe*, a rhythmically complex, free-wheeling dance that had been preserved by Buenos Aires's substantial black community, and was reportedly mimicked by the *compadritos*. Out of this roiling cauldron came the music and dance that would be known as the tango.

THE TANGO WAS at first confined to the brothels of the *arrabal*, and it was therefore frowned upon by high society; but gradually the extraordinary invention inched toward the more well-healed *barrios* in Buenos Aires, as organ-grinders began to include tangos in their repertory, and immigrant musicians brought it to their own cafés and courtyards on the south side of the city. At about the turn of the century, the German-made bandoneon started to replace the guitar, and the quintessential tango timbre of bandoneon mixed with strings emerged. As with jazz, this was a fundamentally new music. Its natural antecedents were visible, but it was greater than the sum of its parts.

The smoldering eroticism of the dance, with its thinly veiled sexual choreography, captured the early tango's gritty setting. The first tango lyrics were full of references to bordello life. (Unfortunately, recordings of these earliest tangos of 1880–1890 do not exist. Many of the lyrics, some of them quite obscene, were improvised.) As the dance flourished in immigrant communities, however, the newcomers shaped the tango in their own image. The melodies and the verses, with certain phrases in an Italianized argot called *lunfardo*, came to reflect a poignant nostalgia for the old world, as well as the bitterness, the disappointment, and the frustrated love that were endured in the new world.

But in the first decade of the twentieth century, even as tango lost its more lascivious edges, Argentina's upper classes still balked at the dance's lowly roots. (The Argentinean poet Leopoldo Lugones memorably dubbed it "that reptile of the brothel.") The tango's fortunes dramatically improved when the dance was introduced in Paris. Europe's high society did not share the Argentineans' taboos, and by the outbreak of World War I a virulent tango fever had spread from Paris to Rome, Madrid, and London. Once the Parisians had condoned the dance, Argentina's own elite repatriated the tango, and held tightly to it.

BEFORE IT WOULD become an essential symbol of Argentina, the tango needed a hero and a saint. He appeared in the 1920s, in the figure of Carlos Gardel. Gardel was a product of the *arrabal* who went on to become tango's most celebrated singer, on stage and on screen, with many hits such as "Por una cabeza" and "Volver." Rising up from his humble roots to stardom, he embodied the dreams of the country's poor in the possibility of class mobility, and his tragic death in an airplane crash in 1935 only hastened his installment as a national icon. More importantly for musical history, Gardel helped to popularize the genre of the *tango canción*—a tango ballad in a cabaret style that was not for dancing, but for listening. Indeed, given all the controversy that Piazzolla would later generate, Gardel's *tango canción* was a radical shift of a much quieter nature.

Still, Gardel's interpretations concluded the music's journey from the periphery to the center. With the singer's immense popularity into the 1930s, and with the tango thriving in the capitals of Europe and America, the music and the dance took on a broader national significance. The tango became a window into a mythic past that included the stoicism and the valor of the gaucho along with the plaintive cries of loneliness of the immigrant. Writers explored the tango's themes in poetry and prose, as an extension of the broader quest to articulate an elusive Argentinean identity. Jorge Luis Borges's "El Tango," for example, evokes the music's folkloric dimensions, its origins on the border between the urban and rural, and its ongoing connection to a vital, if imaginary, moment in the nation's past.

> There is nostalgia in every chord:
> The other patio and the half-seen vine.
> (The South, behind suspicious walls,
> Keeps a knife and a guitar.)
>
> This burst of sound, the tango, this
> Wantonness defies the routine years:
> Made of time and dust, man lasts
> Less long than the libidinous melody,
>
> Which is only time. The tango spawns
> a turbid
> Unreal past in certain measure true:
> An impossible recollection of having
> died
> Fighting, on some corner of a suburb.

Borges's words can help listeners to grasp the tango as a critical symbol in the country's self-understanding. Only within this broader Argentinean context can one make sense of the depth of anger and resentment that greeted Piazzolla's early attempts at innovation. To be sure, there had been successful innovators before him, such as Julio De Caro and Enrique Delfino; but neither these musicians nor the avant-gardists of his own time possessed the talent, the vision, and the audacity that Piazzolla did. He was the most dangerous one, and earning a following for his reinvented tango would be a more arduous task than he ever imagined.

III.

PIAZZOLLA WAS BORN in 1921 in Mar del Plata, Argentina, but he spent the formative years of his childhood on the Lower East Side of New York, to which his father had brought the family in search of economic opportunity. It was there that he began to study the bandoneon, though he did not immediately take to the tango. (Piazzolla's first serious teacher was a Hungarian classical pianist who was also his neighbor. He introduced the wide-eyed boy to the wonders of Bach.) In 1937, the family returned to Argentina, where Piazzolla naturally gravitated toward the tango that was by then swamping the airwaves. By 1939, he had moved to Buenos Aires, and was clamoring for his chance to play in one of the great *orquestas típicas*, or traditional tango orchestras, of the day.

With his already prodigious skill on the bandoneon, it would not be long before Piazzolla was tapped to join Troilo's famous band. But even as he performed nightly, and gained respect in one of the leading bands of the day, the young Piazzolla had other music on his mind. Twice a week, after a full night of playing with skilled but untutored musicians in one of the city's burgeoning night spots, he would return home, eat breakfast with his wife, Dedé, and then travel across town for a lesson in formal composition

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with Alberto Ginastera, who was soon to be one of the continent's most respected classical composers. From Ginastera, he received a theoretical grounding that made him stand out in tango circles.

It was not long before he was arranging music for Troilo's band; but the bandleader did not appreciate Piazzolla's more individual contributions. (He even made an appeal to Dedé: "Stop Astor, he's turning my band into a symphony orchestra!") The young bandoneonist left Troilo, eventually to form his own *orquesta típica* in 1946, in which he refined his arrangements of the tango repertoire. In the band's recordings, one can already hear some elements of the mature Piazzolla emerging in the advanced treatment of the distinct instrumental voices, the nuanced sense of rhythmic inflection, and the consistently virtuosic use of the *obbligato* bandoneon line.

By the early 1950s, Piazzolla was pushing these elements toward what would become his signature style; but still he felt himself torn between the nightclub and the concert hall. While composing and arranging his own tangos, he was pouring over scores by Stravinsky and Bartók, writing his own classical chamber works, and dreaming of joining a more rarefied classical music world. Ironically, it was his eventual encounter with that world that would steer him back toward the tango. The decisive moment came in 1954, after he had won a fellowship to study composition in Paris with Nadia Boulanger.

Boulanger was the master teacher of two generations of composers, including Aaron Copland, Elliott Carter, Virgil Thomson, and Phillip Glass. Piazzolla's studies with her lasted less than six months, but they left a strong impression, as evidenced by the now-famous story of one particular lesson. Boulanger, who had supposedly criticized Piazzolla for the absence of feeling in his classical works, began to question her student about his personal background. The young composer reluctantly revealed his years spent in the popular tango world, and that his primary instrument was not piano but the bandoneon. Relentless, Boulanger insisted that he play her one of his own tangos. He did, and her reaction was immediate: "*This* is Piazzolla. Don't ever leave it!"

The story has become a part of the Piazzolla legend; and while its facticity has never been confirmed (Boulanger did not report on the meeting), its usefulness to Piazzolla was clear from the number of times that he would retell it. Indeed, by recounting the story often as he did, Piazzolla could remind the public of his imprimatur from one of the supreme authorities of high art, and simultaneously reinforce the idea that his own destiny lay in re-inventing the tango. And more deeply, his time with Boulanger left him with the confidence that his diverse musical worlds could be reconciled.

From that point on, Piazzolla devoted himself exclusively to his *nuevo tango*. When he returned to Argentina in 1955, he described himself as arriving "with a stick of dynamite in either hand," ready to take on the conventions of the country's national music. (This was an early taste of the public grandstanding that was to come.) He quickly assembled the Octeto Buenos Aires, the first of many ensembles with which he would champion his new synthesis. Like any self-appointed revolutionary, Piazzolla needed a manifesto, and this came in the form of a *Decalogue* (talk about grandstanding!) that he published around the time of the Octet's founding. Azzi and Collier plausibly speculate that it was written by Piazzolla himself.

The document is a fascinating statement of Piazzolla's blend of radicalism and apologism—a tension that pervaded the composer's career, but which receives little explicit treatment from Collier and Azzi. In the tenets of the *Decalogue*, one sees Piazzolla's ambition to create an expressionistic avant-garde. His group, he declared, aims "to perform the tango as it is *felt*, eliminating all kinds of extraneous influences which can impinge on our fixed purposes." The text also clarifies the group's intention to break with tango's history as a popular dance: "Since [the Octet] is only to be *listened to* by the public, it will not play at dances." Even more heretically, the *Decalogue* proclaims that the group will include electric guitar and percussion instruments that had never been associated with tango. And then, in a dramatic change of tone away from the revolutionary and toward the gently reformist, the hortatory text assures the reader that the band will explain its instrumentation, as well as the structures and the techniques of its music, before each performance, "so as to facilitate an immediate understanding of them."

Finally, in the most direct statement of Piazzolla's conflicting aspirations to be both an avant-gardist and a populist, the document states that the group wishes "to conquer the mass public, a task we take for granted as arduous, but certain as soon as they have heard the themes played many times." The last prediction proved overly sanguine. The Octet was the first of many of Piazzolla's ensembles to be given a mixed reception at home, no doubt because of the unfamiliar sounds that it produced. The use of the electric guitar was foreign in itself, but the guitarist was also encouraged to improvise—something unprecedented in the tango. Azzi and Collier also note the unusual independence given to the piano, as well as the advanced contrapuntal effects in the strings. Among tango traditionalists, the reactions ranged from indifference to bemusement to hostility. Piazzolla himself did little to assuage his listeners, but rather fueled the controversy with inflammatory statements, once denouncing the famous traditional tango "La Cumparsita" in the press, or, as Collier and Azzi report, demanding prison terms for journalists writing about the old tango.

In the end the Octet did not find a broader listening public, and a demoralized Piazzolla disbanded the group and set off for New York, which he hoped would be more receptive to his art. The year that the composer spent in the city of his childhood marked the beginning of his pattern of fleeing his native Argentina when he was feeling creatively straight-jacketed or unappreciated by audiences. (Later in his life, he would live in Europe for almost a decade.) Unfortunately, this short stay in New York produced little more than a rather banal foray into a genre that he called "jazz-tango." In 1960, Piazzolla returned home again, steadfast in his desire to transform the tango *and* win over a large portion of the public to his experiments with the popular form.

Slowly, the first of those two goals began to be realized. This was largely due to the founding of the great Quinteto Nuevo Tango in 1961. This unit was comprised of Piazzolla's own bandoneon with violin, piano, electric guitar, and bass. It was an ideal instrumental combination that combined old and new sonorities, and it was capable of producing both spare and transparent textures as well as opaque soundscapes of impressionistic chaos. It would serve Piazzolla well for over a decade, even as he experimented with larger ensembles, including a brief and decidedly less convincing electronic phase.

The first quintet would also earn Piazzolla a modest respect in Argentina as an avant-gardist; but being an avant-gardist was not enough. In the early days of the Octet, the group called in the tango great Osvaldo Pugliese to rule on whether the ensemble was still performing tango. (He said they were, and the band was relieved.) Conversely, Piazzolla was stung deeply by a passing comment that Troilo,

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his former bandleader, made about the quintet: "*Eso no es tango*." Understandably, as Piazzolla became more and more successful, he coveted the stamp of authenticity less. He also grew more diplomatic in the packaging of his music: in 1972 he entitled a record *Popular Contemporary Music from the City of Buenos Aires*, dispensing with the reference to tango altogether.

Abroad, Piazzolla's music fell on less encumbered ears, and it was heard as the highly original art music that it was. The composer thrived in the places where his music was appreciated, and he spent most of the late '70s and early '80s living in Paris and briefly in Rome. In 1978 he formed his second quintet, arguably his greatest ensemble, and with it he captured audiences by the thousands in tours of Europe, North America, and even the Far East. While traveling or living away from Argentina, he was repeatedly drawn into the circles of the most respected of his classical and jazz contemporaries. Toward the end of his life, he recorded a remarkable album with the Kronos Quartet, and immortalized his own *Concerto for Bandoneon and Orchestra* in a recording with St. Luke's Chamber Orchestra.

Yet the tango's prodigal son could only be away from Argentina for so long, after which he would return home, eventually to find that he was no longer so prodigal. In 1985, he was named an Illustrious Citizen of Buenos Aires, an official acknowledgement that he had won the battle for acceptance in his country. The final five years of his performance career saw countless tours, and his music's debut on Broadway in *Tango Argentina*, and, among other fine recordings, two brilliant final albums with his second quintet, *Tango: Zero Hour* and *La Camorra*. In these albums, one no longer hears the groping toward cohesion that was present on some of the earlier discs. The group was at the high point of its intuitive musical solidarity: they play as five perfectly complementary soloists, with Piazzolla's effulgent bandoneon piercing plangently through the music's surface. Like the tango dance itself, these works combine an unalloyed passion with a sense of tight control. It was a perfect synthesis that would not be maintained for long. In 1990, Piazzolla suffered a devastating stroke, and two years later he died.

Forgiving the Mailman

Let's celebrate another day lost to Eternity.
Minute by minute we eke out the story.
But the spider is on his way from night to night.

The mailman is not the one who ruins our life.
Wind has an affair with a million grains of sand.
Each sand grain has more power than Xerxes.

During those months while we slept in the womb,
Raiders, hired by the Demiurge, broke in,
So that we were born mortgaged and howling.

Madame Bovary could not endure the good life.
She was like us: she wanted disgraceful nights,
Torn clothes, and the inconstant heart.

Our impoverishment follows naturally from our wealth.
The pain that man and wife feel at breakfast
Each day goes back to decisions in Heaven.

What will you say to Mahler about his daughter
Who died young? They used closed carriages in Vienna.
Freud tried to cure the insufficiency of our sorrow.

Robert Bly

As a composer, Piazzolla was at his best when writing for his two quintets, but his output totals approximately 750 works, and they encompass a much broader range of concertos, vocal songs, film and theatrical scores, an opera, and other miscellanies. Whatever the genre, though, his compositions usually built on the tango's rather simplistic structure and its generous *rubato*, adding polyphony, occasional polytonality, and an unprecedented level of swing. Piazzolla also possessed an ear for a wrenching Italianate lyricism that was as highly developed as any of the tango legends that came before him; but beneath those melodies he placed more advanced harmonic progressions that elongate the musical line, adding a poignant sense of deferral. Cadences are reached, but never quite realized.

Piazzolla had at his command a full palette of modernist techniques, but he adamantly rejected the modernist notion that great music must be forbiddingly complex. As a nightly performer of his own compositions, he had too much contact with audiences to let his work degenerate into academicism or formalism. Even at its thorniest, his music is not arid, and it retains an accessibility, an almost cinematic clarity, that puts it at odds with much of the "serious" music composed during his lifetime. This accounts, no doubt, for some of his tremendous appeal among today's artists and presenters who seek to bring audiences something "contemporary" yet approachable.

A deeper irony is that the great revolutionary of the tango, viewed through a classical lens, practiced a positively retrograde aesthetic. This may be one reason why his music does not fare as well when translated into an orchestral context, as with the *Concerto for Bandoneon and Orchestra* or the numerous orchestral arrangements that have been made of his work. Writ large on a symphonic canvas, his melodies often sound pallid and strangely lifeless. When rendered with the intensity and the agility of his quintet, however, the melodies can be electrifying.

It is impossible to understand the popularity of Piazzolla's music in recent years, of course, without also acknowledging the profoundly erotic nature of the tango. In the opening to *Tango: Zero Hour*, Piazzolla's quintet chants the composer's own shorthand for *his* tango: *"Tango. Tragedia. Comedia. Kilombo." Kilombo* means "whorehouse." The composer is often praised for the presence of the first three elements in his music, but his success owes no less to the presence of the last. Indeed, Piazzolla cloaked the music in its most sophisticated garments to date, but his gift lay in how he preserved its essential, irreducible corporeality.

Piazzolla's music was another repackaging of the tango, not unlike the dance's refinement in the early years of the last century, that made it a palatable dish for high cultural consumption; except that Piazzolla repackaged it for an age that admired its inflammatory effect. The eroticism that was once scandalous had become alluring and exotic. And yet Piazzolla was always a master of more than the tango. This composer was both a reformist voice against a static tradition and a grounded artist who could hold as a compass the very music that he was rejecting. Without losing an organic connection to his particular materials, Piazzolla transcended them, and in his best work he sounded the chord of the universal—a delicate feat that few in his century were able to accomplish. ■

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LONDON DIARIST

Going Wobbly

SOMETIMES, I GUESS, YOU'VE got to be there. I was in London when Prime Minister Tony Blair, fresh from the birth of his latest offspring, addressed the Women's Institute's annual conference. The W.I., as it is known, is a quintessentially English institution: at once admirable, faintly ridiculous, and inextinguishable. Ask the average Brit to sum up the group, and she will reply, "Jam and 'Jerusalem,'" meaning that these good and tireless ladies of the English countryside spend a great deal of time making raspberry jelly and singing patriotic hymns. In between, they do mountains of charity work and pass resolutions at committee meetings. They look meek enough at a distance, but if someone were to ask me why England won the war against Hitler, I would place the W.I. alongside Churchill and the Royal Air Force on a short list of probable causes. Nevertheless, these were the women—a sea of floral print smocks topped by cresting waves of curly white hair—whom Blair intended to spin.

THEY REMAINED—HOW SHALL I PUT this?—unspun. Blair's soaring Third Way rhetoric—he's for "responsibility," "opportunity," "tradition," "change," "the individual," "community," and so forth—was met at first with polite silence and then with that slow, sarcastic, coordinated handclapping with which the English show their contempt. Our Tony looked out at the throng of Middle England and smiled one of the most self-evidently terrified smiles I have yet seen on the face of a politician. The *Times* summed it up the next day: "W.I. PUTS BLAIR IN HIS PLACE." Others described it as a collective "handbagging," a form of assault pioneered by Baroness Thatcher. Until then, it probably hadn't occurred to the prime minister that anyone might actually find him insufferable or that the increasing vacuity of his politics might be exposed before his press handlers had had a chance to fix the problem. But suddenly it seemed to dawn on Blair—and the rest of the country—that his honeymoon was finally over and that the era in which his poll numbers could only ascend had finally slumped into what can only be called English political normality.

IT CHEERED EVERYONE UP, WHATever their politics. The English instinctively loathe success of any kind, regarding it as some sort of scam or imprudent luck-pushing. Blair's ability to defy the usual rules of political warfare and remain virtually unchallenged for three years was, from this perspective, an unseemly interlude that the W.I. had mercifully brought to a close. By mid-June, Blair's lead over the Tories had dwindled to three percent—still good for a midterm government but a shadow of its former double-digit splendor. Bolstered by Blair's return to Earth, the country was further reassured by the English soccer team's early losses in the European Cup, the elimination of British tennis star Tim Henman in the second round of the Stella Artois tournament, the rioting of English soccer thugs in Belgium, and a particularly ferocious season of pollen that reduced most nasal passages to a quivering blur. The English hadn't felt so at ease since the Millennium Dome—that vast, empty structure in Greenwich, which has become synonymous with New Labour—proved a total bust. The satisfaction reached its peak when the brand-new Millennium Bridge, an elegant structure linking the Tate Modern to St. Paul's Cathedral, turned out, once opened to the public, to wobble alarmingly in the wind. "Typical, innit?" commented a friend of mine, a huge grin plastered all over his face.

OF COURSE, THE WOBBLE WAS THE point. I braved the crowds to make it across the bridge in the few days it was open, and I have to say it would have been far more boring without the occasional wind-driven lurch. Everyone seemed to be having a blast. "Mummy, can we leave before the whole thing collapses?" one toddler inquired. His mother, however, was having too much fun. The English will do their best to persuade you otherwise, but they are actually enjoying themselves a lot these days, and you can see why. New Labour, in economic matters now all but indistinguishable from the Conservatives, is presiding over Britain's ninth straight year of solid economic growth. A madcap former Marxist—"Red Ken" Livingstone—is now mayor of London, taking every opportunity to embarrass his own prime minister from the left. My old friend William Hague has endured three years of merciless ridicule to emerge as a steely, populist leader of the Tories, his broad Yorkshire accent regularly flattening Blair's pompous stutter in the Commons. Next up will be what promises to be a wonderful dustup when the Labour government, in a grim attempt to shore up its left wing, tries to ban foxhunting. It's been a long time since "Tally-ho!" frightened anyone but a fox, but wait till the beagles start massing in Westminster.

MY GUT TELLS ME THE NEXT ELECtion will be far closer than anyone now expects. Only one issue really matters. It is whether Britain will decide in the next few years to abandon a currency it has used since the Middle Ages in favor of one that has existed for two years and is controlled by Germans. Blair is idolized in the American press—the most recent example was a fawning profile in *The New York Times Magazine*—but the true test of any leader is his ability to guide his country through a momentous decision. Right now, Blair refuses to say what he really believes on the matter. He reads the polls, which show deep popular discomfort with the euro. He says—against all reason—that the decision is of no constitutional importance. He has promised a referendum on the issue after the next election (if he wins) but still hasn't said for certain which side he'll take. It will depend, he argues, purely on the economic circumstances. Mere technicalities. Nothing important. If we're ready, we'll sign up. If not, we won't. Trust me.

THREE MONTHS AGO, THIS MIGHT have been enough. Now it isn't. Hague, despite protests from the europhilic dinosaurs in his own party, has wedded the Tories to a simple platform: saving the pound. It has none of the finesse of the focus-group-driven slogans of New Labour. It is not a third way. It is post-nothing. But it is a position, a stand, a view. It is an argument with which one could possibly disagree, which is more than can be said for most of the platitudes coming from the government. For these reasons, it may ultimately work. The British have seen the slick, sophisticated sheen of post-everything Blairism, and they're beginning to tire of it. They watched as the Blairites constructed the Millennium Dome as a monument to futurism, and they stayed away in droves. They have seen the gleaming prospect of a federalist, statist, anti-American Europe, and they expect the worst. To them, it all looks just a little bit wobbly, and they'd rather stay, however unfashionably, on this side of the water. Typical, innit?

ANDREW SULLIVAN

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AMERICA'S FORGOTTEN MAJORITY

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